2025 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Athlon Sports

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EDITOR'S LETTER

The tagline for the 2025 college football season essentially writes itself.

"Arch Madness" is upon us, and like Tebowmania before it, it's threatening to consume all the available oxygen this season. And the fact that Arch Manning's Texas Longhorns are *Athlon Sports*' preseason pick to emerge from the College Football Playoff with a national championship doesn't exactly do much to slow the runaway hype train.

Archibald Charles Manning, scion of America's First Family of quarterbacks, has been on the national radar ever since fans caught wind that lesser-known Manning brother Cooper had a quarterback-playing son who had started under center for his high school season opener — as a freshman. That high school just happened to be Isidore Newman School, where Peyton and Eli Manning had matriculated, cut their football teeth and set their legendary careers in motion.

As with Peyton and Eli before him, the key ingredient of the Arch Manning football phenomenon was a legitimate talent for the sport's marquee position. And he proved it by breaking his uncles' staggering Isidore Newman records. In his four-year career at the prestigious New Orleans prep school, Arch threw for 8,539 yards (breaking Eli's school record of 7,268) and 115 touchdowns (breaking Peyton's record of 93).

As with his uncles, Arch was a coveted commodity, but he ended the suspense and put a lid on the recruiting insanity by committing to Texas prior to his senior season at Newman. Just further proof that Manning — marked by an uncommon and enviable maturity — was made for a moment like this.

And exactly what is this moment? Only the most transformational period in the sport's history. If you're a college football fan, I hardly need to spell it out for you. Name, Image and Likeness collectives, combined with essentially unfettered free agency, have professionalized the college game to a degree that few would have dreamed possible only a decade ago. Gathering elite talent is no longer the exclusive purview of a few CFB bluebloods. Oddly, this marshaling of vast resources has democratized the game to a dramatic degree. Last season saw Arizona State, Indiana, SMU and Boise State playing meaningful playoff games while Alabama, LSU and Oklahoma (among others) watched from home.

The methodology has changed, but the formula is largely the same: When you land an Arch Manning, you keep him for as long as you can, assemble some key pieces around him and set about the business of winning championships. And for the first time since Vince Young ran around, past and through USC at the 2006 Rose Bowl, Texas looks primed to do exactly that.

This magazine is always a labor of love — and it would have to be, given the countless hours spent monitoring the spring transfer portal for the latest moves. Thanks to the diligent work of college football editor Steven Lassan and our entire team, we think we've come as close as we can get to an accurate picture of college football, circa 2025.

Enjoy the season.

Rob Doster

ROB DOSTER, MANAGING EDITOR

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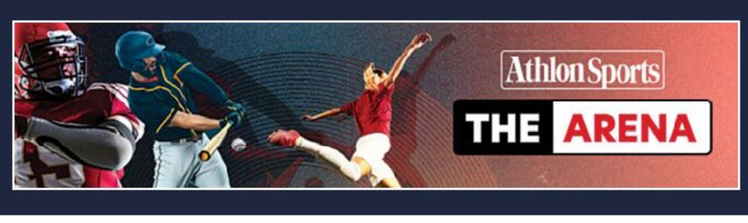

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2025

TOP 25

BY STEVEN LASSAN

1. TEXAS

It's Arch Manning's time at Texas. After waiting two years behind Quinn Ewers, Manning assumes full control of head coach Steve Sarkisian's offense. No player has had more hype or anticipation in recent seasons than Manning, but the sophomore is poised to meet the moment. Aiding Manning's debut is a roster that Sarkisian has stocked with elite talent and lacks a glaring weakness. The offensive line will be under construction early in '25, but assistant Kyle Flood should have this group ready for the Week 1 showdown at Ohio State. The Longhorns are counting on a couple of transfers, along with the development of sophomore Ryan Wingo, to boost a receiving corps losing three key weapons. CJ Baxter returns from a season-ending knee injury to join Quintrevion Wisner in a deep stable of running backs. There are a few question marks on defense, but Sarkisian and coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski bolstered the line through the portal, and end Colin Simmons and linebacker Anthony Hill are among the nation's top returning defenders. The secondary will miss NFL first-round pick Jahdae Barron, but cornerback Malik Muhammad is the next star. If Manning meets the hype, and the offensive line and defensive holes are filled as expected, the Longhorns will bring a national title back to the Forty Acres for the first time since 2005.

2. PENN STATE

If the Nittany Lions are going to break through under head coach James Franklin, the 2025 season is their best opportunity. A team that fell just short of a trip to the national title game is stocked with experience. And Penn State's stoutest competitors in the Big Ten — Ohio State, Oregon and Michigan — are rebuilding in '25. Quarterback Drew Allar passed on the NFL, and three transfer additions — Trebor Pena, Devonte Ross and Kyron Hudson — upgrade the receiving corps and alleviate the loss of tight end Tyler Warren to the NFL. Running backs Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen also passed on the next level to chase a national title, a goal made easier with a stalwart offensive line returning. The Nittany Lions owned one of the nation's top defenses last season, holding teams to 16.5 points per game. But this unit could be even better in '25, as veteran play-caller Jim Knowles left the archrival Buckeyes to take over defensive coordinator duties in Happy Valley. An experienced roster held together through offseason roster retention paid off for Michigan in 2023 and Ohio State in '24 to win national titles. The Nittany Lions could be the next team to fit that mold.

FROM TOP: SARA DIGGINS/USA TODAY NETWORK VIA IMAGN IMAGES; DAN RAINVILLE

ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

3. OHIO STATE

Matching last year's four-game playoff run and national championship is a tall order for head coach Ryan Day. The Buckeyes had 14 players selected in the NFL Draft and have new play-callers on both sides of the ball. Day handed offensive play-calling duties to Brian Hartline, while former NFL head coach Matt Patricia has taken over the defensive responsibilities. Despite all of the turnover, the upside for this team is obvious. Former 5-star quarterback Julian Sayin takes control of Day's high-powered offense, with a Heisman candidate — and arguably the best returning player in college football — in receiver Jeremiah Smith leading the way on the outside. West Virginia transfer CJ Donaldson arrives to alleviate the loss of the 1-2 punch of Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson at running back. Safety Caleb Downs headlines a defense returning only three starters, one that left spring with concerns in the trenches and doubts about overall depth. Key games against Texas and Penn State are in Columbus, but the annual showdown against Michigan is on the road.

4. GEORGIA

Kirby Smart's Bulldogs enter 2025 with more preseason question marks than the program has experienced in recent years. But as always in Athens, talent and the next wave of superstars aren't in short supply. New quarterback Gunner Stockton gained valuable experience in a Sugar Bowl start against Notre Dame, and the arrival of Noah Thomas (Texas A&M) and Zachariah Branch (USC) bolstered a receiving corps that was inconsistent in '24. The Bulldogs uncharacteristically struggled to run the ball last year and return only one starter up front. Georgia's usually stout defense is also in transition with key losses at every level. How quickly Smart and his staff develop Stockton and all of the promising young players on both sides of the ball will decide how high Georgia can climb in '25.

5. CLEMSON

Any doubts surrounding Clemson's ability to win at a high level in the transfer portal era were answered in '24. The Tigers won the ACC championship and returned to the playoff after a three-year absence. Not only is Dabo Swinney's program a heavy favorite to win the ACC again, but another national title is also within reach. Cade Klubnik developed into one of the nation's top quarterbacks last year, with receivers Bryant Wesco and Antonio Williams filling Clemson's need for more big-play ability. The defense has regressed since Brent Venables left for Oklahoma. However, Swinney is hoping for improvement under new coordinator Tom Allen, who was previously at Penn State. With 14 returning starters and an upgraded defense, the Tigers have all of the necessary pieces to return to the top tier of college football.

6. NOTRE DAME

The Fighting Irish got a taste of high-level success last season with a trip to the national championship game. Now, the next mission is simple: bring a title back to South Bend. Marcus Freeman's team is poised for another deep run this fall and can hoist the big trophy if unproven quarterback CJ Carr delivers on his 5-star hype. But Notre Dame won't have to lean on Carr to win games, thanks to a rushing attack powered by Heisman candidate Jeremiyah Love and an offensive line that ranks among the best in college football. New defensive coordinator Chris Ash has holes to fill with only five returning starters. One of those, though, is shutdown corner Leonard Moore, who returns to anchor the secondary, and there is plenty of talent waiting in the wings. A road trip to Miami (Fla.) is a tough way to start '25, but Notre Dame could be favored in its other 11 contests.

7. LSU

Entering a crucial fourth year in charge, head coach Brian Kelly has all of the pieces aligned for a deep playoff run. Roster retention was an offseason priority, and the Tigers spent millions to sign the SEC's best transfer class. Included in that haul was help for quarterback Garrett Nussmeier at receiver and along the offensive line. Also, LSU landed impact additions on the defensive line and the secondary. The Bayou Bengals hope the combination of improved personnel and the second

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year under defensive coordinator Blake Baker will transform a unit that has slipped from the top of the SEC. LSU opens with a monster showdown at Clemson but plays swing games against Florida, South Carolina and Texas A&M at home.

8. ALABAMA

Last season's nine wins in Kalen DeBoer's debut were a notch below the standard at Alabama. However, DeBoer took steps with roster retention, portal additions and coaching moves to return the Crimson Tide to the playoff. A defense that held teams to 17.4 points per game last year will be stingy again with seven returning starters. Despite losing quarterback Jalen Milroe, the offense could improve in '25. Longtime DeBoer assistant Ryan Grubb takes over as offensive coordinator and will oversee a three-man quarterback battle with Ty Simpson in the lead after spring practice. Wide receiver Ryan Williams is back after a dynamic freshman season, while three returning starters anchor a standout offensive line.

9. OREGON

Only six starters return from last season's team that earned the No. 1 seed in the College Football Playoff. Dan Lanning's program has major retooling to do on both sides of the ball, but the Ducks should remain in contention for the Big Ten title. New quarterback Dante Moore is ready to direct Oregon's high-powered attack after sitting behind Dillon Gabriel last year. Lanning restocked Moore's supporting cast through the portal, including top pickups in offensive lineman Isaiah World (Nevada) and running back Makhi Hughes (Tulane). With the defensive line and secondary in rebuild mode, Oregon will need Moore and the offense to carry this team early in '25. A road trip to Penn State on Sept. 27 is an opportunity to see how far along the Ducks are in the reloading process.

10. MIAMI (FLA.)

The Hurricanes won the offseason thanks to the arrival of another standout recruiting class, along with a transfer portal haul that addressed several weaknesses. The biggest acquisition was Georgia's Carson Beck to replace No. 1 overall NFL Draft pick Cam Ward at quarterback. Beck suffered a significant elbow injury in the SEC Championship Game but is on track to return for the opener. With a young receiving corps, Miami may need to lean on its offensive line and ground game to carry the team early on. Improving the defense was head coach Mario Cristobal's biggest offseason priority. New coordinator Corey Hetherman directed one of the Big Ten's top defenses at Minnesota, and transfer reinforcements are coming to bolster a leaky secondary.

11. FLORIDA

The Gators have momentum after ending 2024 on a four-game winning streak. The late surge helped ease the pressure on head coach Billy Napier, especially with quarterback DJ Lagway's emergence into superstar status. However, the Gators will be holding their breath all offseason after Lagway was limited in spring practice due to a shoulder injury. Center Jake Slaughter is back to anchor one of the SEC's top lines, and Lagway has plenty of support at the skill spots. After a slow start, Florida's defense improved late in the year and held its last four opponents to 13 points per contest. The Gators could play seven preseason Top 25 teams on a daunting schedule. Lagway's recovery and development will shape just how successful the '25 season will be.

12. SOUTH CAROLINA

The emergence of quarterback LaNorris Sellers in the second half of 2024 carried South Carolina to the doorstep of the College Football Playoff. For the Gamecocks to take the next step, Sellers will have to be even better after the departure of running back Rocket Sanders and three starters on the offensive line. South Carolina's defense is also retooling some at every level, but end Dylan Stewart returns after a standout freshman debut. Road games against LSU, Ole Miss and Texas A&M will make or break the Gamecocks' 25 season.

13. KANSAS STATE

The Wildcats have won at least nine games in each of the past three seasons and have the pieces in place to return to the top of the Big 12 for the first time since '22. Head coach Chris Klieman's offense is powered by dynamic quarterback Avery Johnson, with big-play threat Dylan Edwards taking over for DJ Giddens at running back. Kansas State's defense has holes to fill in the secondary, but the front is loaded with depth and experience. The schedule includes a Big 12 season-opening showdown in Ireland against Iowa State, along with road games at Utah, Kansas and Baylor.

14. ARIZONA STATE

The Sun Devils exceeded all preseason expectations in 2024 with a Big 12 championship and a near-upset of Texas in the Peach Bowl play-

GARY COSBY JR.-TUSCALOOSA NEWS

off quarterfinal. Repeating as the champion of the wide-open Big 12 won't be easy, but head coach Kenny Dillingham's team returns the most starters (16) in the conference. Quarterback Sam Leavitt and receiver Jordyn Tyson are back, with a committee of backs slated to fill the void left by All-American Cam Skattebo. A defense that held teams to 22.6 points a game last year could be even better this fall. The only downside for Arizona State is a road schedule featuring games at Baylor, Utah and Iowa State.

JUNFU HAN

15. MICHIGAN

After closing out the 2024 season with wins over Ohio State and Alabama, along with the commitment of 5-star quarterback Bryce Underwood, second-year coach Sherrone Moore has Michigan back on track. If Underwood develops as expected, a return to the College Football Playoff is within reach. But the freshman won't have to carry this team. The Wolverines bring back six starters from a standout defense, and the offense can lean on the backfield tandem of Justice Haynes and Jordan Marshall. The schedule breaks in Michigan's favor. Ohio State comes to Ann Arbor, and Moore's team won't play Oregon or Penn State.

16. INDIANA

Making another trip to the playoff against a tougher schedule won't be easy. But the Hoosiers have staying power with transfer quarterback Fernando Mendoza in control of head coach Curt Cignetti's high-powered offense. All-America defensive end Mikail Kamara leads the defense.

17. ILLINOIS

The Fighting Illini return 16 starters from a squad that quietly won 10 games last year. Head coach Bret Bielema's team needs to retool its receiving corps and defensive line, but quarterback Luke Altmyer and a strong offensive line are back. Illinois could be a surprise contender for a College Football Playoff berth.

18. OLE MISS

Just four starters are back, but optimism is high in Oxford. Quarterback Austin Simmons is a rising star, and head coach Lane Kiffin once again dipped into the portal for instant help on both sides of the ball. The schedule is backloaded, giving Kiffin time to find the right answers.

19. TEXAS A&M

The Aggies ended head coach Mike Elko's debut season with with four losses over the final five games. Elko took steps to address last year's shortcomings by taking on a larger role on defense and adding playmakers to aid in the development of quarterback Marcel Reed. How Reed performs holds the keys to A&M's '25 season.

20. OKLAHOMA

After injuries wrecked Oklahoma's offense last season, the arrival of a new play-caller (Ben Arbuckle) and quarterback (John Mateer) from Washington State provides a spark. Head coach Brent Venables also took over play-calling duties for a defense returning six starters.

21. TENNESSEE

The Volunteers' hopes of a return to the playoff took a hit when quarterback Nico Iamaleava transferred to UCLA. After relying on running back Dylan Sampson and a strong defense in '24, head coach Josh Heupel needs new faces to emerge quickly.

22. TEXAS TECH

Thanks to an NIL war chest, Texas Tech landed arguably the nation's best transfer portal class. Head coach Joey McGuire also hired coordinator Shiel Wood away from Big 12 rival Houston to fix a struggling defense.

23. IOWA STATE

Quarterback Rocco Becht is back, but Iowa State must replace receivers Jayden Higgins and Jaylin Noel. The schedule is favorable; BYU, Arizona State and Kansas all come to Ames.

24. SMU

With a tougher schedule, head coach Rhett Lashlee's team must reload a defense returning only two starters to go with dynamic quarterback Kevin Jennings leading the offense.

25. BOISE STATE

Running back Ashton Jeanty will be missed, but quarterback Maddux Madsen's return ensures that the Broncos are still the team to beat in the Group of 5. Showdowns vs. South Florida and Notre Dame loom large.

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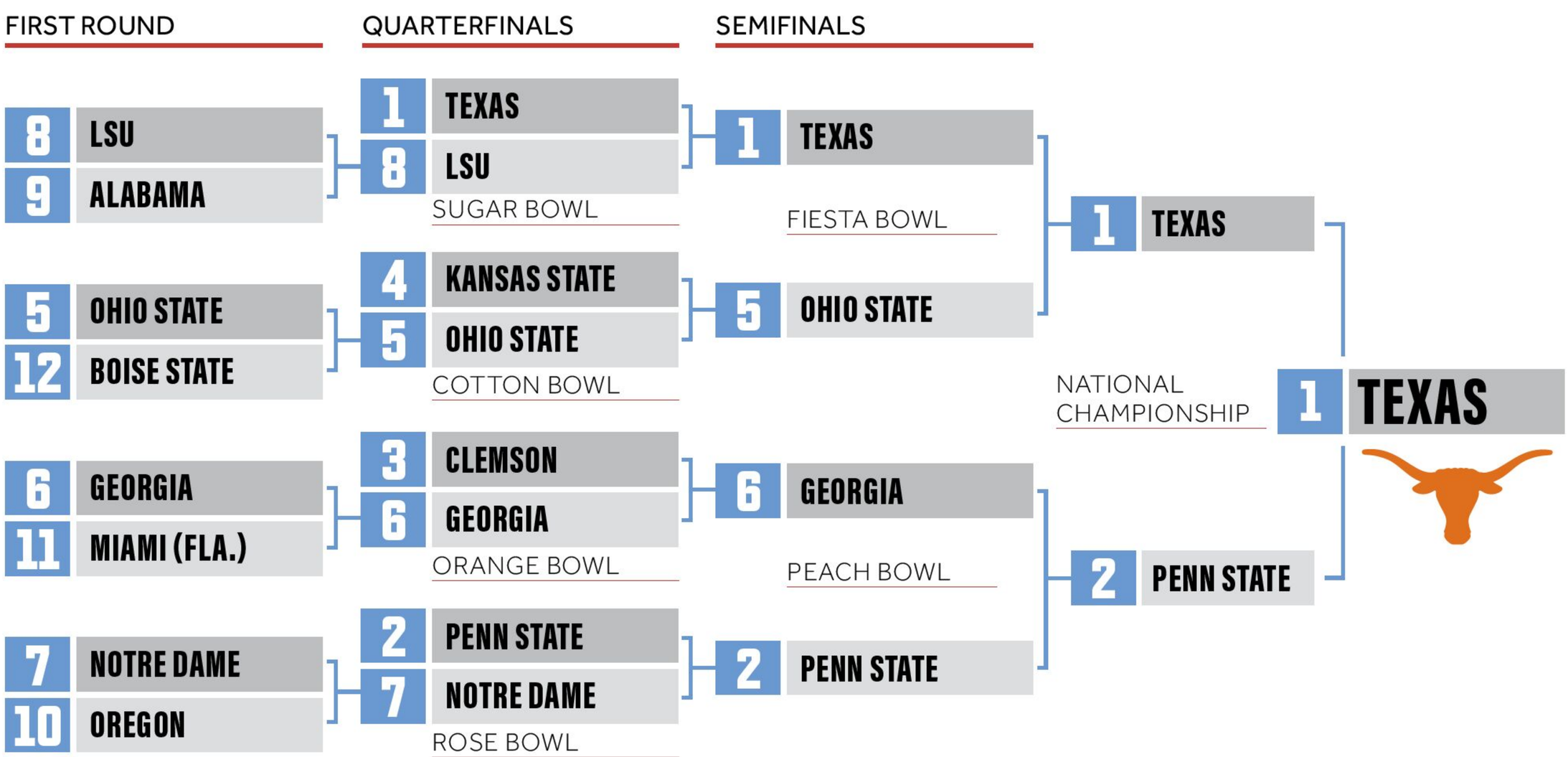
2025

PLAYOFF BRACKET



FIRST-ROUND BYES:
TEXAS, KANSAS STATE, CLEMSON, PENN STATE

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30. BYU
31. Auburn
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33. Utah
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38. Washington
39. Arkansas
40. Vanderbilt
41. Duke
42. Minnesota
43. Rutgers
44. Wisconsin
45. Florida State
46. Kentucky
47. Pitt
48. Tulane
49. Navy
50. Colorado
51. Houston
52. North Carolina
53. Michigan State
54. NC State
55. Virginia Tech
56. Boston College
57. Syracuse
58. South Florida
59. James Madison
60. UNLV
61. Cincinnati
62. UCLA
63. UTSA
64. Army
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Auburn vs. Kansas

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Washington vs. Florida State

LAS VEGAS
Pac-12 vs. Big Ten
Arizona State vs. Nebraska

FENWAY
ACC vs. American
NC State vs. Army

PINSTRIPE
Big Ten vs. ACC
Indiana vs. Pitt

NEW MEXICO
Mountain West vs. CUSA
Fresno State vs. Texas State*

POP-TARTS
ACC vs. Big 12
Louisville vs. BYU

ARIZONA
MAC vs. Mountain West
Northern Illinois vs. San José State

MILITARY
ACC vs. American
North Carolina vs. Navy

ALAMO
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INDEPENDENCE
Pac-12/Big 12 vs. AAC
TCU vs. Vanderbilt*

MUSIC CITY
Big Ten vs. SEC
Illinois vs. Tennessee

RELIAQUEST
Big Ten vs. SEC
Iowa vs. South Carolina

SUN
ACC vs. Pac-12
Duke vs. Utah

CHEEZ-IT CITRUS
Big Ten vs. SEC
Michigan vs. Florida

TEXAS
Big 12 vs. SEC
Iowa State vs. Oklahoma

GATOR
SEC vs. ACC
Texas A&M vs. SMU

FIRST RESPONDER
Big 12 vs. AAC/CUSA/ACC
Houston vs. Oregon State*

DUKE'S MAYO
ACC vs. SEC
Georgia Tech vs. Ole Miss

BAHAMAS
CUSA vs. MAC
Jacksonville State vs. Miami (Ohio)

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

FIRST ROUND
No. 5 Ohio State vs. No. 12 Boise St.
No. 6 Georgia vs. No. 11 Miami (Fla.)
No. 7 Notre Dame vs. No. 10 Oregon
No. 8 LSU vs. No. 9 Alabama

QUARTERFINALS
Cotton Bowl
No. 4 Kansas State vs. No. 5 Ohio State
Orange Bowl
No. 3 Clemson vs. No. 6 Georgia
Rose Bowl
No. 2 Penn State vs. No. 7 Notre Dame
Sugar Bowl
No. 1 Texas vs. No. 8 LSU

SEMIFINALS
Fiesta Bowl
No. 1 Texas vs. No. 5 Ohio State
Peach Bowl
No. 2 Penn State vs. No. 6 Georgia

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
No. 1 Texas vs. No. 2 Penn State

*Indicates at-large team selected with conference unable to fill allotted bowl spots.

2025

ALL-AMERICA

JEREMIAH SMITH

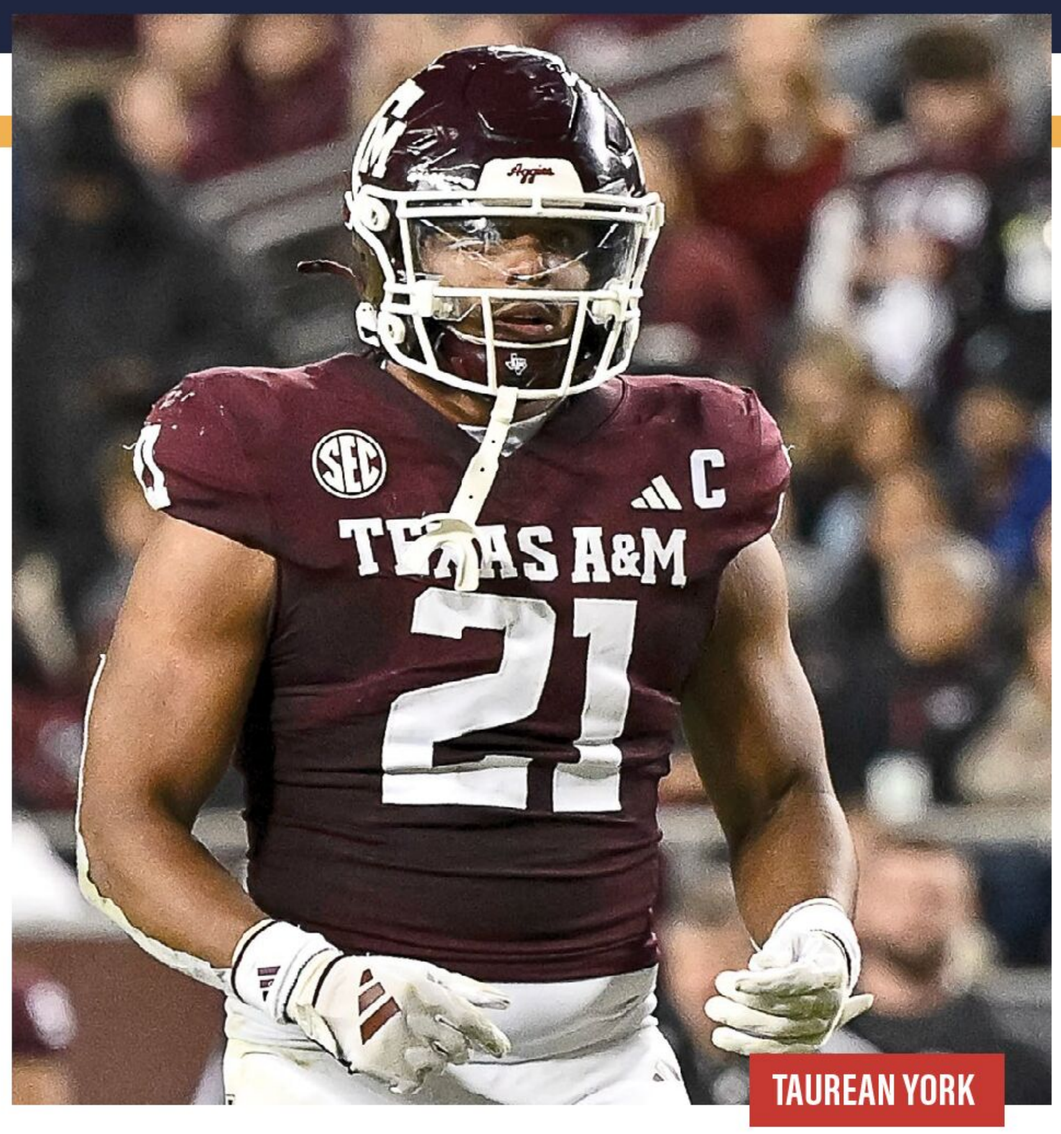
1ST TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	ARCH MANNING TEXAS	
RB	JEREMIYAH LOVE NOTRE DAME	
RB	NICHOLAS SINGLETON PENN STATE	
AP	DESMOND REID PITT	
WR	JEREMIAH SMITH OHIO STATE	
WR	RYAN WILLIAMS ALABAMA	
WR	JORDYN TYSON ARIZONA STATE	
TE	ELI STOWERS VANDERBILT	
C	JAKE SLAUGHTER FLORIDA	
OL	SPENCER FANO UTAH	
OL	KADYN PROCTOR ALABAMA	
OL	FRANCIS MAUIGOA MIAMI (FLA.)	
OL	OLAIVAVEGA IOANE PENN STATE	

ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

WHIT WEEKS



TAUREAN YORK

DEFENSE

DL	DYLAN STEWART SOUTH CAROLINA	
DL	COLIN SIMMONS TEXAS	
DL	T.J. PARKER CLEMSON	
DL	PETER WOODS CLEMSON	
LB	ANTHONY HILL JR. TEXAS	
LB	WHIT WEEKS LSU	
LB	KYLE LOUIS PITT	
LB	TAUREAN YORK TEXAS A&M	
CB	LEONARD MOORE NOTRE DAME	
CB	JERMOD McCOY TENNESSEE	
S	CALEB DOWNS OHIO STATE	
S	DILLON THIENEMAN OREGON	

SPECIALISTS

K	DOMINIC ZVADA MICHIGAN	
P	BRETT THORSON GEORGIA	
KR	KEELAN MARION MIAMI (FLA.)	
PR	JOSH CAMERON BAYLOR	

JOSH CAMERON

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES; MARIA LYSAKER-IMAGN IMAGES; CHRIS JONES-IMAGN IMAGES

2025

ALL-AMERICA 2ND TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	CADE KLUBNIK CLEMSON	
RB	MAKHI HUGHES OREGON	
RB	ISAAC BROWN LOUISVILLE	
AP	KAYTRON ALLEN PENN STATE	
WR	ELIJAH SARRATT INDIANA	
WR	ANTONIO WILLIAMS CLEMSON	
WR	CARNELL TATE OHIO STATE	
TE	JACK ENDRIES TEXAS	
C	LOGAN JONES IOWA	
OL	PARKER BRAILSFORD ALABAMA	
OL	KAGE CASEY BOISE STATE	
OL	AR'MAJ REED-ADAMS TEXAS A&M	
OL	AAMIL WAGNER NOTRE DAME	

ELIJAH SARRATT

RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

DEFENSE

DL	MIKAIL KAMARA INDIANA	
DL	DANI DENNIS-SUTTON PENN STATE	
DL	MATAYO UIAGALELEI OREGON	
DL	RUEBEN BAIN JR. MIAMI (FLA.)	
LB	SUNTARINE PERKINS OLE MISS	
LB	SONNY STYLES OHIO STATE	
LB	CJ ALLEN GEORGIA	
LB	AUSTIN ROMAINE KANSAS STATE	
CB	CHANDLER RIVERS DUKE	
CB	D'ANGELO PONDS INDIANA	
S	MICHAEL TAAFFEE TEXAS	
S	KJ BOLDEN GEORGIA	

SPECIALISTS

K	WILL FERRIN BYU	
P	RHYS DAKIN IOWA	
KR	BARION BROWN LSU	
PR	KADEN WETJEN IOWA	

ALL-AMERICA 3RD TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	GARRETT NUSSMEIER LSU	
RB	BRYSON WASHINGTON BAYLOR	
RB	JONAH COLEMAN WASHINGTON	
AP	DYLAN EDWARDS KANSAS STATE	
WR	CAM COLEMAN AUBURN	
WR	MAKAI LEMON USC	
WR	CARNELL TATE CLEMSON	
TE	JUSTIN JOLY NC STATE	
C	IAPANI LALOULU OREGON	
OL	JORDAN SEATON COLORADO	
OL	GENNINGS DUNKER IOWA	
OL	CAYDEN GREEN MISSOURI	
OL	BLAKE MILLER CLEMSON	

JUSTIN JOLY

JIM DEDMON-IMAGN IMAGES

DEFENSE

DL	TREY WHITE SAN DIEGO STATE	
DL	TYREAK SAPP FLORIDA	
DL	KELDRIC FAULK AUBURN	
DL	LT OVERTON ALABAMA	
LB	AIDEN FISHER INDIANA	
LB	GABE JACAS ILLINOIS	
LB	DRAYK BOWEN NOTRE DAME	
LB	DEONTAE LAWSON ALABAMA	
CB	MALIK MUHAMMAD TEXAS	
CB	AVIEON TERRELL CLEMSON	
S	KOI PERICH MINNESOTA	
S	ISAIAH NWOKOBIA SMU	

SPECIALISTS

K	PEYTON WOODRING GEORGIA	
P	PALMER WILLIAMS BAYLOR	
KR	KADEN WETJEN IOWA	
PR	KAM SHANKS ARKANSAS	

25TH ANNUAL
UNIT RANKINGS

ACC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Boston College	12	10	9	10	13	13	8
Cal	15	16	16	14	8	14	14
Clemson	1	6	1	2	1	1	1
Duke	5	8	11	6	3	5	2
Florida State	8	7	8	7	6	6	6
Georgia Tech	4	4	3	5	11	7	7
Louisville	6	1	2	4	7	3	9
Miami (Fla.)	2	2	5	1	2	4	3
North Carolina	13	15	10	11	12	16	13
NC State	10	9	4	8	10	9	12
Pitt	7	3	6	9	5	2	5
SMU	3	11	7	3	4	8	4
Stanford	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Syracuse	14	14	15	13	14	12	11
Virginia	11	13	14	15	15	10	15
Virginia Tech	9	12	12	12	9	11	10
Wake Forest	16	5	13	16	16	15	16

AMERICAN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Army	9	5	14	4	5	1	3
Charlotte	10	12	11	13	12	9	13
East Carolina	6	6	2	8	6	8	6
Florida Atlantic	5	14	6	9	11	11	12
Memphis	7	4	5	6	2	6	4
Navy	1	2	13	5	4	4	5
North Texas	8	7	3	7	8	7	7
Rice	14	10	10	11	9	5	9
South Florida	2	9	4	2	3	3	2
Temple	11	11	12	10	10	13	10
Tulane	4	1	7	1	1	2	1
Tulsa	13	8	9	14	14	14	14
UAB	12	13	8	12	13	12	11
UTSA	3	3	1	3	7	10	8

ANTONIO WILLIAMS, WR, CLEMSON

BLAKE HORVATH, QB, NAVY

FROM TOP: MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

BIG 12

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Arizona	10	11	11	13	15	14	10
Arizona State	1	3	1	1	2	3	1
Baylor	3	1	3	3	8	5	5
BYU	8	8	6	9	4	2	8
Cincinnati	13	9	10	10	10	10	13
Colorado	12	16	7	12	12	12	9
Houston	11	13	9	11	9	11	11
Iowa State	4	6	5	5	11	8	3
Kansas	6	7	12	7	7	9	12
Kansas State	2	2	8	4	1	1	4
Oklahoma State	15	15	14	16	16	16	15
TCU	5	14	4	8	6	7	6
Texas Tech	7	5	2	6	3	4	7
UCF	16	10	16	15	13	13	14
Utah	9	12	13	2	5	6	2
West Virginia	14	4	15	14	14	15	16

BIG TEN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Illinois	4	8	8	5	10	5	3
Indiana	6	9	4	6	6	6	8
Iowa	7	7	15	3	4	8	4
Maryland	17	16	14	16	17	17	17
Michigan	8	3	9	9	3	3	6
Michigan State	11	18	10	13	14	15	13
Minnesota	16	6	12	14	7	11	10
Nebraska	5	13	7	8	8	10	11
Northwestern	13	15	17	15	13	14	15
Ohio State	2	4	1	2	2	1	1
Oregon	3	2	2	4	5	2	5
Penn State	1	1	3	1	1	4	2
Purdue	18	14	18	18	18	18	18
Rutgers	14	11	13	11	11	13	14
UCLA	12	17	16	17	15	16	16
USC	10	10	5	10	9	12	12
Washington	9	5	6	12	12	7	7
Wisconsin	15	12	11	7	16	9	9

BRYSON WASHINGTON, RB, BAYLOR

JEREMIAH SMITH, WR, OHIO STATE

FROM TOP: CHRIS JONES-IMAGN IMAGES; ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

UNIT RANKINGS

CUSA

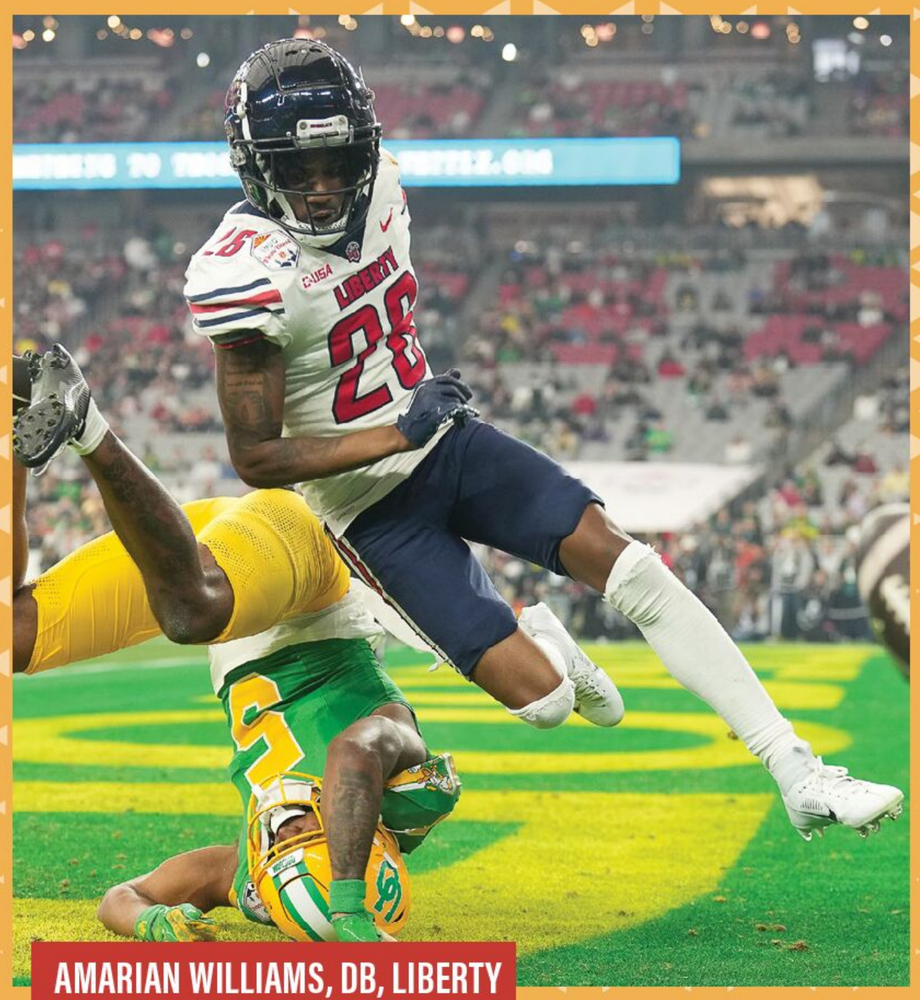
	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Delaware	7	3	7	3	2	2	4
FIU	4	7	12	11	10	11	8
Jacksonville State	10	2	5	6	3	9	7
Kennesaw State	12	12	10	12	8	4	2
Liberty	2	1	3	1	1	1	1
Louisiana Tech	8	9	6	9	7	3	3
Middle Tennessee	6	11	9	8	6	8	10
Missouri State	3	10	8	5	12	12	12
New Mexico State	11	5	11	10	11	5	9
Sam Houston	5	4	4	2	9	10	11
UTEP	9	6	2	7	4	6	6
WKU	1	8	1	4	5	7	5

MAC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Akron	6	13	8	10	12	10	11
Ball State	12	11	10	12	10	11	12
Bowling Green	5	10	7	3	7	6	8
Buffalo	4	1	5	1	1	1	3
Central Michigan	7	9	9	7	5	2	5
Eastern Michigan	8	8	6	9	9	8	9
Kent State	13	6	13	13	13	13	13
Miami (Ohio)	1	7	3	4	4	3	2
Northern Illinois	9	4	12	5	2	5	7
Ohio	2	5	4	8	8	9	4
Toledo	3	2	1	2	3	4	1
UMass	11	12	11	11	11	12	10
Western Michigan	10	3	2	6	6	7	6

MOUNTAIN WEST

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Air Force	12	5	12	2	4	9	8
Boise State	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Colorado State	5	6	5	4	7	3	6
Fresno State	4	4	6	6	2	7	2
Hawai'i	6	12	1	9	8	4	5
Nevada	9	8	8	10	11	10	10
New Mexico	11	3	9	12	12	6	12
San Diego State	8	7	7	8	6	5	4
San José State	3	9	4	7	5	2	7
UNLV	2	2	3	3	3	8	3
Utah State	7	10	11	11	10	11	9
Wyoming	10	11	10	5	9	12	11

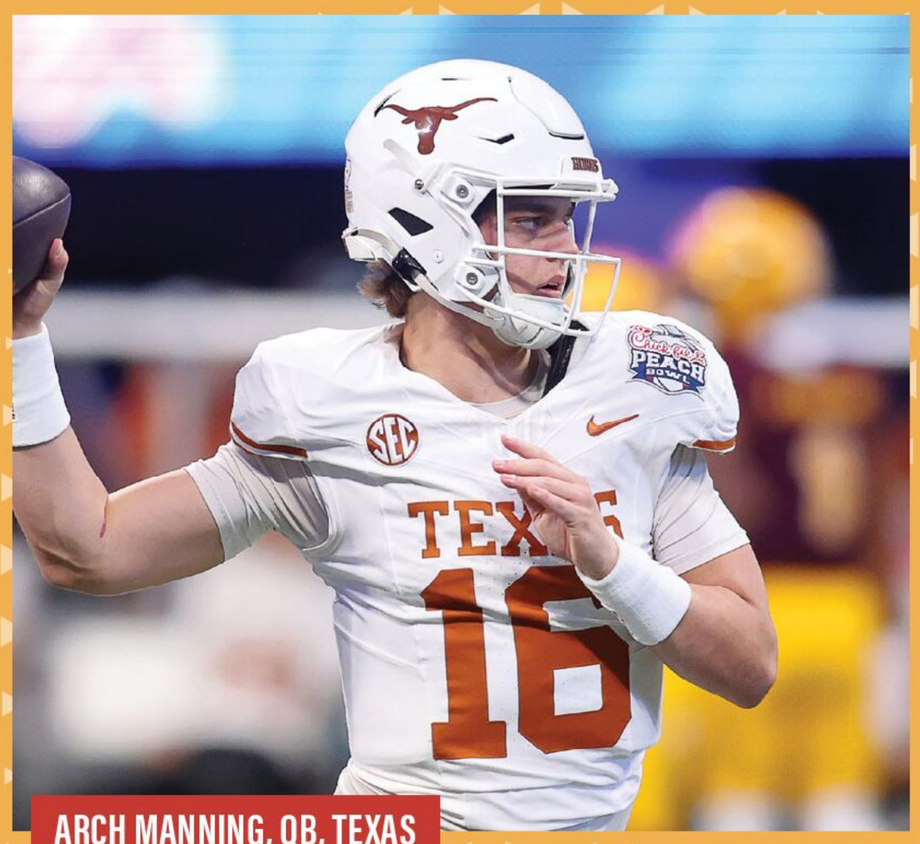


AMARIAN WILLIAMS, DB, LIBERTY

JUNIOR VANDEROSS III, WR, TOLEDO

MARCO NOTARAINNI, LB, BOISE STATE

FROM TOP: JOE CAMPOREALE-USA TODAY SPORTS; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES (2)



ARCH MANNING, QB, TEXAS

SEC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Alabama	11	7	1	3	3	3	2
Arkansas	7	15	13	13	14	12	15
Auburn	12	13	2	6	10	11	8
Florida	4	4	7	2	8	7	10
Georgia	9	3	5	5	2	2	3
Kentucky	16	10	16	14	15	15	14
LSU	2	8	3	7	7	4	5
Missouri	14	6	8	10	11	8	7
Miss. State	13	14	14	15	16	16	16
Oklahoma	6	5	10	9	4	10	9
Ole Miss	8	11	6	11	9	5	12
South Carolina	3	12	12	12	6	14	6
Tennessee	15	9	11	8	5	9	4
Texas	1	1	4	4	1	1	1
Texas A&M	10	2	9	1	12	6	11
Vanderbilt	5	16	15	16	13	13	13

SUN BELT

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Appalachian State	11	7	10	12	10	6	8
Arkansas State	3	10	4	11	8	11	11
Coastal Carolina	10	11	6	4	12	8	12
Georgia Southern	5	9	3	2	4	9	2
Georgia State	12	5	5	13	9	13	14
James Madison	2	1	8	3	1	2	1
Louisiana	8	2	11	7	2	5	6
Marshall	13	13	13	14	14	14	13
Old Dominion	4	14	12	9	5	1	9
South Alabama	6	3	2	6	11	3	10
Southern Miss	1	8	7	10	7	12	3
Texas State	7	4	1	1	6	7	7
Troy	9	12	9	5	3	4	4
ULM	14	6	14	8	13	10	5

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

NATIONAL UNIT RANKINGS

QUARTERBACKS

1. Texas
2. Clemson
3. LSU
4. South Carolina
5. Florida
6. Penn State
7. Ohio State
8. Arizona State
9. Miami (Fla.)
10. Oregon

RUNNING BACKS

1. Penn State
2. Notre Dame
3. Texas
4. Texas A&M
5. Oregon
6. Georgia
7. Louisville
8. Baylor
9. Florida
10. Michigan

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Ohio State
2. Clemson
3. Alabama
4. Auburn
5. LSU
6. Texas
7. Oregon
8. Georgia
9. Arizona State
10. Penn State

OFFENSIVE LINE

1. Notre Dame
2. Penn State
3. Texas A&M
4. Miami (Fla.)
5. Florida
6. Alabama
7. Clemson
8. Texas
9. Ohio State
10. Iowa

DEFENSIVE LINE

1. Texas
2. Clemson
3. Penn State
4. Georgia
5. Alabama
6. Notre Dame
7. Ohio State
8. Michigan
9. Oklahoma
10. Miami (Fla.)

LINEBACKERS

1. Texas
2. Georgia
3. Ohio State
4. Notre Dame
5. Clemson
6. Alabama
7. Pitt
8. Oregon
9. LSU
10. Michigan

DEFENSIVE BACKS

1. Texas
2. Alabama
3. Notre Dame
4. Ohio State
5. Penn State
6. Georgia
7. Clemson
8. Tennessee
9. Illinois
10. LSU

INSIDE saturday

HEISMAN WATCH

BY KYLE WOOD

TIER 1

QB ARCH MANNING, TEXAS

He's already a household name, but Manning's time has truly arrived after two years waiting in the wings. Longhorns fans saw the former No. 1 recruit make two starts while Quinn Ewers was injured, and Manning dazzled with his arm and legs. Given Texas' success in its first season in the SEC, head coach Steve Sarkisian's offensive acumen and Manning's family name, expectations for the redshirt sophomore could hardly be higher.

QB GARRETT NUSSMEIER, LSU

Nussmeier is the only returning passer who threw for 4,000-plus yards in 2024. Combine similar statistical success with College Football Playoff contention, and Nussmeier could join the likes of Joe Burrow and Jayden Daniels as a Heisman-winning Tigers' signal-caller.

QB CADE KLUBNIK, CLEMSON

Klubnik took a massive leap in his second season, leading the Tigers back to the CFP.

WR JEREMIAH SMITH, OHIO STATE

Smith could be the best pass-catcher to come through Columbus, and that's saying something.

QB LaNORRIS SELLERS, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Gamecocks were one of the hottest teams in the country down the stretch thanks to Sellers' ascension.

QB DANTE MOORE, OREGON

Oregon added weapons and protection in the portal and its recruiting class for Moore.

QB JULIAN SAYIN, OHIO STATE

The former 5-star prospect will benefit from throwing to what might be the best receiver room in the country.

QB DJ LAGWAY, FLORIDA

Florida's schedule will test Lagway, but his rocket arm is up to the task.

QB DREW ALLAR, PENN STATE

Allar hit some lofty heights in his second season as the starter.

QB CARSON BECK, MIAMI (FLA.)

The crown jewel of the transfer portal, Beck could follow in Cam Ward's footsteps and enjoy similar success.

TIER 2

QB SAM LEAVITT, ARIZONA STATE
RB JEREMIYAH LOVE, NOTRE DAME
QB GUNNER STOCKTON, GEORGIA
WR RYAN WILLIAMS, ALABAMA

DON'T FORGET ABOUT

QB Kevin Jennings, SMU
QB Austin Simmons, Ole Miss
QB Marcel Reed, Texas A&M
QB John Mateer, Oklahoma
QB Dylan Raiola, Nebraska
QB Miller Moss, Louisville
QB Luke Altmyer, Illinois
QB Fernando Mendoza, Indiana
RBs Nicholas Singleton/ Kaytron Allen, Penn State

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

10 BEST GAMES OF 2025

BY KYLE WOOD

1 TEXAS AT OHIO STATE (AUG. 30)

For the second season in a row, the Longhorns will take on the defending national champions on the road. The Buckeyes bounced Texas in the CFP semifinal at the Cotton Bowl, so there's a revenge component in play here. Oh, and this titanic season opener doubles as the first official game of the Arch Manning era — in hostile territory. Get your popcorn ready, folks.

FROM TOP: AARON E. MARTINEZ/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN; THOMAS SHEA-IMAGN IMAGES

2. LSU AT CLEMSON (AUG. 30)

Garrett Nussmeier and Cade Klubnik might just be the top two quarterbacks in college football this season, and one of them will get an early leg up in the Heisman race in this Death Valley duel. These two Tigers teams have struggled out of the gate in recent years: Clemson has lost two straight season openers, while LSU has lost its past five. Something has to give.

3. TEXAS AT GEORGIA (NOV. 15)

The Longhorns ran through their inaugural season in the SEC almost unscathed. Almost. The Bulldogs beat Texas twice — once in Austin, and again in Atlanta in the conference championship game. Texas heads to Athens late in the year for a game that could swing the SEC standings — and maybe even the Heisman race.

4. OHIO STATE AT MICHIGAN (NOV. 29)

If not now, then when for Ryan Day and the Buckeyes? The Wolverines extended their winning streak in the rivalry to four games last fall, putting more pressure on Day before Ohio State won it all. The series shifts back to Ann Arbor this season, where Michigan could be trotting out a true freshman quarterback. If these teams have taught us anything, it's that anything can happen in The Game.

5. NOTRE DAME AT MIAMI (FLA.) (AUG. 31)

In a renewal of the famed Catholics vs. Convicts rivalry, the Irish head to South Florida for the first time since 2017 to take on the Hurricanes in the season opener. National championship runner-up Notre Dame has serious designs on winning it all this season, while Miami is gunning for its first CFP appearance.

6. ALABAMA AT GEORGIA (SEPT. 27)

The Crimson Tide still got the best of the Bulldogs in a down year thanks to wide receiver Ryan Williams' late-game heroics. Georgia hosts Alabama between the hedges in Bama's SEC opener, an opportunity for the Dawgs to buck their continued struggles in this storied series.

7. OREGON AT PENN STATE (SEPT. 27)

Penn State returns a good deal of production from a roster that almost went to the national championship, while Oregon reloaded like few teams can. Here's hoping we get a White Out for this conference championship rematch.

8. LSU AT ALABAMA (NOV. 8)

The Crimson Tide embarrassed the Tigers in Baton Rouge last fall, and the wheels subsequently fell off for both teams. Head coaches Brian Kelly and Kalen DeBoer both have national champion expectations that they have yet to deliver on. A win in this rivalry could go a long way toward a return to the CFP.

9. ARIZONA STATE AT IOWA STATE (NOV. 1)

The first-ever meeting between the Sun Devils and Cyclones in the Big 12 title game last season saw Arizona State punch its ticket to the CFP. Quarterbacks Sam Leavitt and Rocco Becht — two long-shot Heisman contenders — are both back.

10. PENN STATE AT OHIO STATE (NOV. 1)

Even in a year when Penn State put it all together and made it to the CFP semifinal, James Franklin's squad still fell to Ohio State in Happy Valley. Ohio native Drew Allar leads the Nittany Lions into The Horseshoe late in the year for a potentially pivotal Big Ten clash. The Buckeyes have won eight in a row in the series, including the past six in Columbus.

TOP TRANSFERS

BY STEVEN LASSAN

QB CARSON BECK | MIAMI (FLA.) FROM GEORGIA

Beck's play in '24 slipped a bit from his prolific debut in '23, but he still threw for 3,485 yards and 28 scores and is expected to be at 100% following surgery to repair an elbow injury.

QB JOHN MATEER
OKLAHOMA FROM WASHINGTON STATE

Mateer's dynamic ability (330.4 total yards per game in 2024) is a huge boost for an Oklahoma offense that averaged only 16.5 points per game in SEC play last year.

QB JACKSON ARNOLD
Auburn from Oklahoma
A better supporting cast and system should help Arnold rebound this fall.

QB TOMMY CASTELLANOS
Florida State from Boston College
Castellanos' rushing ability should be a perfect fit for Gus Malzahn's offense.

QB DEVON DAMPIER
Utah from New Mexico
Dampier led the Mountain West in total offense (327.8 yards per game).

QB MARK GRONOWSKI
Iowa from South Dakota St.
Gronowski is a massive upgrade under center.

QB GIO LOPEZ
North Carolina from South Alabama
Lopez's post-spring transfer answered North Carolina's biggest concern.

QB FERNANDO MENDOZA
Indiana from California
His accuracy and skill set should be a great fit.

QB DARIAN MENSAH
Duke from Tulane
Mensah emerged as one of the top Group of 5 quarterbacks.

QB MILLER MOSS
Louisville from USC
Moss should rebound under Louisville head coach and QB guru Jeff Brohm.

QB BEAU PRIBULA
Missouri from Penn State
Pribula shined (242 rushing yards) as a change-of-pace QB at Penn State.

QB JOEY AGUILAR
Tennessee from UCLA
Aguilar left UCLA after Nico Iamaleava's arrival in what amounted to a QB swap.

QB KAIDON SALTER
Colorado from Liberty
If Salter can regain his 2023 form, the Buffaloes may not miss a beat.

QB CONNER WEIGMAN
Houston from Texas A&M
Former 5-star prospect could jumpstart a struggling Houston offense.

RB FLUFF BOTHWELL
Mississippi State from South Alabama
Bothwell flashed big-play ability (7.5 yards per carry) as a freshman in '24.

RB CJ DONALDSON
Ohio State from West Virginia
Departures of Quinshon Judkins and TreVeyon Henderson open the door for Donaldson.

RB AHMAD HARDY
Missouri from ULM
Hardy led all freshmen with 1,351 rushing yards.

RB JUSTICE HAYNES
Michigan from Alabama
Haynes joins Jordan Marshall to form one of the Big Ten's top backfields.

RB MAKHI HUGHES
Oregon from Tulane
Had back-to-back 1,300-yard seasons for the Wave.

RB JAYDN OTT
Oklahoma from Cal
Injuries limited Ott last season, but he ran for 1,135 yards in '23.

WR NIC ANDERSON
LSU from Oklahoma
Averaged 21 yards per catch as a freshman in '23.

WR BARION BROWN
LSU from Kentucky
Brown has elite speed and will be a difference-maker on special teams with five career touchdown returns.

WR ZACHARIAH BRANCH
Georgia from USC
Branch and Noah Thomas (Texas A&M) are welcome additions.

WR KC CONCEPCION
Texas A&M from NC State
His versatility will boost an A&M offense that lacked big-play ability in '24.

WR CJ DANIELS
Miami (Fla.) from LSU
Daniels brings experience (53 career games) and production (148 catches).

WR MALACHI FIELDS
Notre Dame from Virginia
Caught 113 passes for 1,619 yards and 10 touchdowns in his last two seasons at Virginia.

FROM LEFT: BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES; JAMES SNOOK-IMAGN IMAGES

QB NICO IAMALEAVA | UCLA FROM TENNESSEE

Iamaleava will look to get his career back on track after a high-profile departure from Tennessee.

DL DAVID BAILEY | TEXAS TECH FROM STANFORD

Bailey recorded 12 sacks and led Stanford in tackles for a loss in each of the past two years.

WR DEVONTE ROSS
Penn State from Troy
Ross and fellow transfers Kyron Hudson (USC) and Trebor Pena (Syracuse) provide quarterback Drew Allar with needed help at receiver.

WR DANE KEY
Nebraska from Kentucky
Key brings the ability to stretch the field.

WR ERIC RIVERS
Georgia Tech from FIU
11th nationally in receiving yards (1,172) last season.

WR DUCE ROBINSON
Florida State from USC
Robinson bolsters one of the Noles' biggest weaknesses from last year.

WR ERIC SINGLETON JR.
Auburn from Georgia Tech
Should team with Cam Coleman to form one of the SEC's top duos.

TE JACK ENDRIES
Texas from Cal
Endries was second among ACC tight ends in '24 with 56 catches.

TE MAX KLARE
Ohio State from Purdue
Caught 51 passes for 685 yards for a struggling Purdue offense in '24.

OL XAVIER CHAPLIN
Auburn from Virginia Tech
Chaplin will protect new quarterback Jackson Arnold's blindside.

OL PAT COOGAN
Indiana from Notre Dame
Coogan was the heart and soul of a standout Notre Dame offensive line.

OL BRAELIN MOORE
LSU from Virginia Tech
24-game starter with the Hokies should slide into the starting center spot.

OL SAM PENDLETON
Tennessee from Notre Dame
Pendleton helps solidify the interior of the O-line.

OL EMMANUEL PREGNON
Oregon from USC
Pregnon brings valuable experience (25 starts at USC) to a rebuilt line.

OL HOWARD SAMPSON
Texas Tech from North Carolina
Sampson headlines three major transfer pickups for Tech in the trenches.

OL ISAIAH WORLD
Oregon from Nevada
Allowed just three sacks over the past two seasons.

DL WILL HELDT
Clemson from Purdue
Heldt (10 tackles for a loss in '24) fills a need off the edge.

DL WILLIAMS NWANERI
Nebraska from Missouri
Former 5-star prospect primed for impact in '25.

DL PATRICK PAYTON
LSU from Florida State
Payton ranks near the top among active players in career sacks (16).

DL JAMES WILLIAMS
Florida State from Nebraska
Williams' arrival alleviates the loss of ends Patrick Payton (LSU) and Marvin Jones Jr. (Oklahoma).

DL PRINCEWILL UMANMIELEN
Ole Miss from Nebraska
Former 4-star prospect should thrive with more snaps off the edge.

DL DAMON WILSON
Missouri from Georgia
Wilson's ability to create havoc should boost Missouri's pass rush.

DB TACARIO DAVIS
Washington from Arizona
Davis did not allow a touchdown in coverage over the past two seasons.

DB MANSOOR DELANE
LSU from Virginia Tech
Delane brings experience (29 career starts) and coverage ability (six INTs) .

DB XAVIER LUCAS
Miami (Fla.) from Wisconsin
Lucas returns to his home state after a standout freshman season.

DB DILLON THIENEMAN
Oregon from Purdue
Thieneman is now a key cog in Oregon's rebuilt secondary.

FROM LEFT: SAUL YOUNG; NATHAN GIESE/AVALANCHE-JOURNAL

GRADING 2025'S NEW HEAD COACHES

BY STEVEN LASSAN

1 RICH RODRIGUEZ WEST VIRGINIA

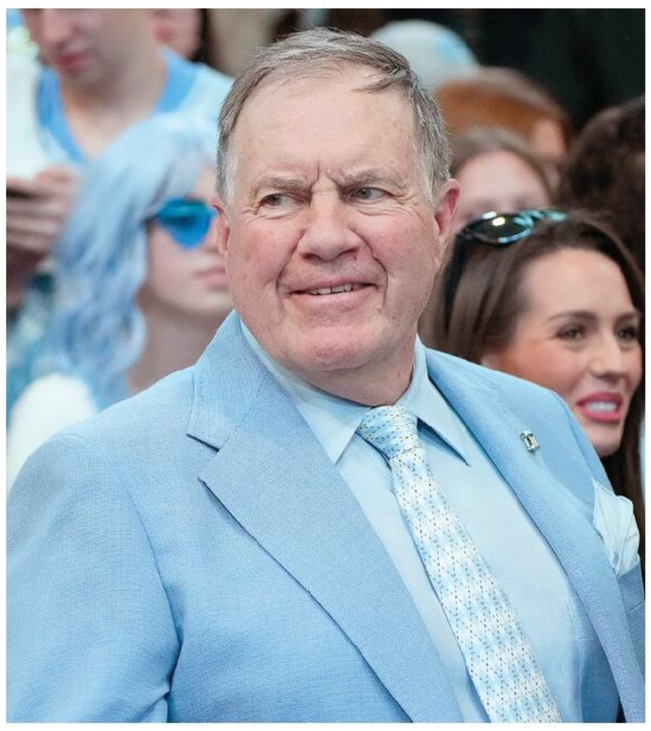
The West Virginia native went 60-26 from 2001-07 with the Mountaineers before making the big jump to Michigan. After a disastrous (21-27) stint and acrimonious departure for Michigan, Rodriguez went 43-35 at Arizona (2012-17) and finished 27-10 at Jacksonville State (2022-24). Rodriguez has won at nearly every stop in his coaching career and will be eager to get redemption after a messy breakup from his alma mater in '07.

GRADE: A+

2 BRONCO MENDENHALL UTAH STATE

Mendenhall returns to his home state of Utah after a successful one-year stop at New Mexico. He previously went 99-43 with four double-digit win seasons at BYU from 2005-15 and later directed Virginia to a 36-38 mark from 2016-21. With extensive regional ties and a strong track record, Mendenhall is a home-run hire for Utah State as it prepares to move to the Pac-12 in '26.

GRADE: A+



3 BILL BELICHICK NORTH CAROLINA

Belichick isn't likely to stick around long in Chapel Hill, and it's fair to have concerns about how he will adapt to the college game. However, for a North Carolina program that has struggled to consistently win at a high level, taking the opportunity to hire arguably the greatest coach in NFL history is a no-brainer.

GRADE: A

4. BARRY ODOM, PURDUE

After guiding UNLV to its best two-year stretch in program history and back-to-back trips to the Mountain West Championship Game, Odom landed his second chance at a power conference job. He previously went 25-25 at Missouri from 2016-19. Odom's ties to the Midwest, along with his growth as a head coach since his stint at Missouri, should make this a home-run hire. **Grade: A**

5. DAN MULLEN, UNLV

After going 20-8 the past two seasons, UNLV is well-positioned to take that next step. Known for his prolific offenses, Mullen has two (mostly) successful head-coaching stints on his résumé. From 2009-17, he won 69 games at Mississippi State (ond of the hardest jobs in the SEC). And from 2018-21, Mullen went 34-15 at Florida, with one appearance in the SEC Championship Game. **Grade: A**

6. CHARLES HUFF, SOUTHERN MISS

Despite a 32-20 record, Huff's fractured relationship with Marshall's administration led to his departure following the '24 season. In his final year with the Thundering Herd, Huff guided the team to a Sun Belt title and the program's first double-digit win total (10) since '15. With an NIL investment that should be among the best in the Sun Belt, the Golden Eagles appear primed for a quick turnaround. **Grade: A**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ALEX MARTIN/JOURNAL AND COURIER; DENNY MEDLEY-USA TODAY SPORTS; BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES; JOHN REED-IMAGN IMAGES; BEN QUEEN-IMAGN IMAGES

7. K.C. KEELER, TEMPLE

Under Keeler's watch, Delaware won a I-AA (now FCS) title in '03. From 2014-24, Keeler guided Sam Houston to 97 wins, led the team to a FCS national title in 2021 and helped the program successfully transition to the FBS level. **Grade: A**

8. TIM ALBIN, CHARLOTTE

After a 3-9 debut at Ohio, Albin guided the Bobcats to a 30-10 mark over the next three seasons. Hiring a proven coach with a track record of maximizing his roster is a huge upgrade for Charlotte. **Grade: A**

9. MATT ENTZ, FRESNO STATE

The Iowa native went 60-11 and guided North Dakota State to two FCS Championships from 2019-23. That success, along with his work with the USC defense in '24, propelled him into the top spot at Fresno State. **Grade: A**

10. SCOTT FROST, UCF

Can Frost recapture the magic from his first stint at UCF? From 2016-17, the Knights went 19-7, including a perfect 13-0 campaign. However, Frost's tenure at Nebraska was a massive disappointment. With less pressure away from Lincoln, Frost should be able to thrive once again in Orlando. **Grade: B+**

11. JAKE DICKERT, WAKE FOREST

Dickert knows how to maximize talent. His eight wins in '24 were the best mark of his tenure at Washington State. He has no experience coaching on the East Coast or in the ACC, so he will need time to adapt. **Grade: B+**

12. ZACH KITTLEY, FLORIDA ATLANTIC

The 33-year-old Texas native has been on a fast rise beginning with a three-year run calling plays for Houston Baptist (2018-20) and continuing to WKU ('21) and Texas Tech (2022-24). Under Kittley's watch, the Hilltoppers ranked No. 2 nationally in scoring offense, while the Red Raiders finished No. 4 in '24. **Grade: B+**

13. WILLIE SIMMONS, FIU

From 2015-17, Simmons guided FCS Prairie View A&M to a 21-11 mark. And from 2018-23, he won 45 games at FCS Florida A&M. With ties and experience in the state, Simmons is a strong fit for a program with upside. **Grade: B+**

14. JASON ECK, NEW MEXICO

Eck garnered a wealth of experience as an assistant from a variety of stops from 1999-2021, including a stint at FCS South Dakota State (2016-21). Eck guided Idaho to a 26-13 mark with three FCS Playoff trips from 2021-23. **Grade: B+**

15. MATT DRINKALL, CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Drinkall spent the past six years as an assistant at Army. Prior to that, he went 42-17 as the head coach at NAIA Kansas Wesleyan. His offensive background and track record at the lower levels make him the right outside-the-box hire. **Grade: B+**

16. JOE HARASYMIAK, UMASS

UMass is a tough job, but the New Jersey native has experience at a tough place to win, going 20-15 as FCS Maine's head coach from 2016-18. **Grade: B+**

17. JIMMY ROGERS, WASHINGTON STATE

The Arizona native joined the South Dakota State staff in '13 and worked his way up to head coach. Rogers maintained South Dakota State's high standards, going 27-3 overall and winning the FCS National Championship in '23. **Grade: B+**

18. EDDIE GEORGE, BOWLING GREEN

Not only does George bring instant name recognition, but he's also a proven and successful head coach. From 2021-24, he went 24-22 at Tennessee State, including a 9-4 mark with a trip to the FCS Playoffs in '24. **Grade: B+**

DYLAN WIDGER-USA TODAY SPORTS

19. SCOTT ABELL, RICE

Abell went 39-24 at Division III Washington & Lee from 2012-17 and guided Davidson to 47 wins and three FCS playoff trips over seven seasons (2018-24). **Grade: B**

20. JERRY MACK, KENNESAW STATE

The Tennessee native spent the '24 campaign in the NFL as a running backs coach for the Jacksonville Jaguars but has prior experience at the FBS level with stints at Memphis, South Alabama, Rice and Tennessee as an assistant. **Grade: B**

21. BRIAN SMITH, OHIO

Smith helped Ohio's offense rank No. 1 in the MAC in scoring in '24 and guided the team to a win over Jacksonville State in the Cure Bowl for his first game in charge. **Grade: B**

22. TRE LAMB, TULSA

Lamb arrives in Tulsa with five years of head-coaching experience. His offensive background should fit well into the AAC. **Grade: B**

23. DOWELL LOGGAINS, APPALACHIAN STATE

Loggains' work in developing LaNorris Sellers helped the redshirt freshman emerge as one of the top quarterbacks in the SEC in 2024. **Grade: C+**

24. PHIL LONGO, SAM HOUSTON

This tenure marks a return to Sam Houston for Longo, who has produced solid offenses for the bulk of his coaching career. **Grade: C+**

25. TONY GIBSON, MARSHALL

Few coaches know the Mountain State better than Gibson. The longtime assistant has spent the past five years coordinating one of the ACC's top defenses at NC State. **Grade: C+**

26. MIKE UREMOVICH, BALL STATE

With an offensive background and a track record of maximizing rosters at lower levels, Uremovich is a solid fit. **Grade: C+**

27. BLAKE HARRELL, EAST CAROLINA

After winning his first four games as interim head coach, Harrell guided East Carolina to a bowl win over NC State to earn the job. **Grade: C**

28. CHARLES KELLY, JACKSONVILLE STATE

The Alabama native's ties to the program and state check off a lot of boxes. **Grade: C-**

COACHES ON THE HOT SEAT

BY STEVEN LASSAN

HUGH FREEZE, AUBURN

Freeze has the talent level on the rise at Auburn, but he's posted back-to-back losing records since taking over in '23. The Tigers are 5-11 in SEC play in that span, and the offense — Freeze's side of the ball — has ranked near the bottom of the conference in scoring.

BRENT BRENNAN, ARIZONA

Brennan inherited a roster capable of contending for the Big 12 title. Instead, the Wildcats regressed to 4-8, with six losses by 20 points or more. Add in a new athletic director who didn't hire Brennan, and it's clear that the second-year coach needs to show marked improvement.

SONNY CUMBIE, LOUISIANA TECH

Louisiana Tech is coming off its best record (5-8) under Cumbie, but entering his fourth season in Ruston, he has yet to have a winning season, posting a record of 11-26.

TONY ELLIOTT, VIRGINIA

Virginia took a step forward in 2024 with the program's best mark (5-7) of Elliott's tenure. However, the Cavaliers are 11-23 and have just six ACC wins since Elliott took over in '22. The Cavs have finished 12th or worst in the ACC in scoring every season under Elliott, whose background is on offense.

LUKE FICKELL, WISCONSIN

After a 57-18 record and a trip to the College Football Playoff at Cincinnati, Ficklell was a heralded hire in 2023. But two years later, Fickell is on the hot seat with a 12-13 record, and the program missed a bowl last season for the first time since '01.

MIKE GUNDY, OKLAHOMA STATE

After a prolific playing career and leading the program to 169 overall victories as head coach, Gundy is Oklahoma State football. But after last year's 3-9 record and reworked contract that included a pay cut, it's clear that Gundy is under some pressure.

MIKE NORVELL, FLORIDA STATE

The Seminoles never recovered from the College Football Playoff snub in 2023, plummeting to a 2-10 mark last season. High-profile coordinator hires in Gus Malzahn (offense) and Tony White (defense) should be a massive boost to Norvell in what could be a make-or-break year.

BILLY NAPIER, FLORIDA

Athletic director Scott Stricklin gave Napier a vote of confidence in early November, and the Gators responded with a four-game winning streak that included victories over LSU and Ole Miss to finish the year, cooling the pressure a bit. However, with a full offseason to develop quarterback DJ Lagway, Napier can't afford to take a step back in the win column.

SAM PITTMAN, ARKANSAS

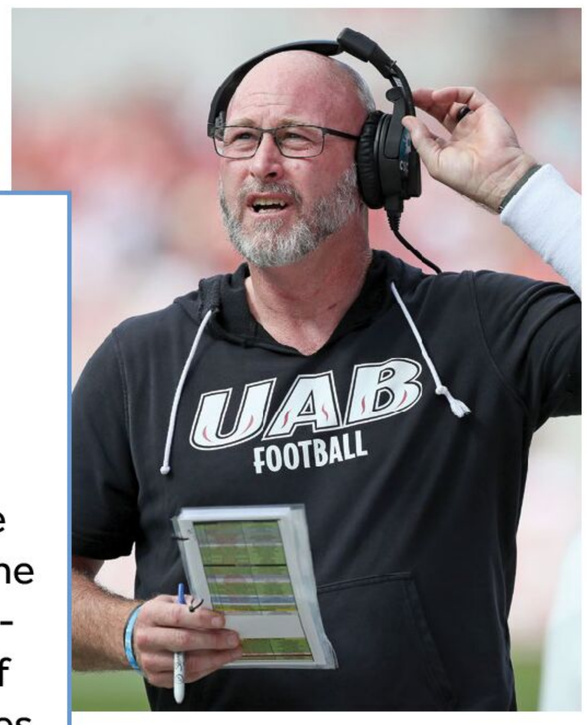
Pittman topped most hot seat lists in 2023, but he steadied the ship with a 7-6 record last fall. The Razorbacks are 30-31 under Pittman's watch and have earned bowl trips in three out of the last four years. But if Arkansas doesn't exceed last season's win total of seven, doubts will grow.

BRENT PRY, VIRGINIA TECH

After a promising finish to the '24 season, expectations were high for a step forward for Pry's Hokies last year. However, they underachieved with a 6-7 mark to bring Pry's overall record in Blacksburg to 16-21.

SCOTT SATTERFIELD, CINCINNATI

Satterfield was a surprising hire at Cincinnati following a 17-19 record in his final three years at Louisville. Through two seasons, Satterfield has struggled to find his footing, with an 8-16 mark.



TRENT DILFER, UAB

Although the former NFL QB brought name recognition, Dilfer's only experience as a coach was a four-year stint at a private Tennessee high school. The Blazers are 7-17 under Dilfer and have fielded one of the nation's worst defenses in that span.

BRENT VENABLES, OKLAHOMA

Transitioning to the SEC wasn't supposed to be easy, but a 6-7 record in '24 gave Venables his second losing season at Oklahoma — the program's only two losing marks since 1999. Venables hit the reset button on his offensive staff and will handle the defensive play-calling duties in '25.

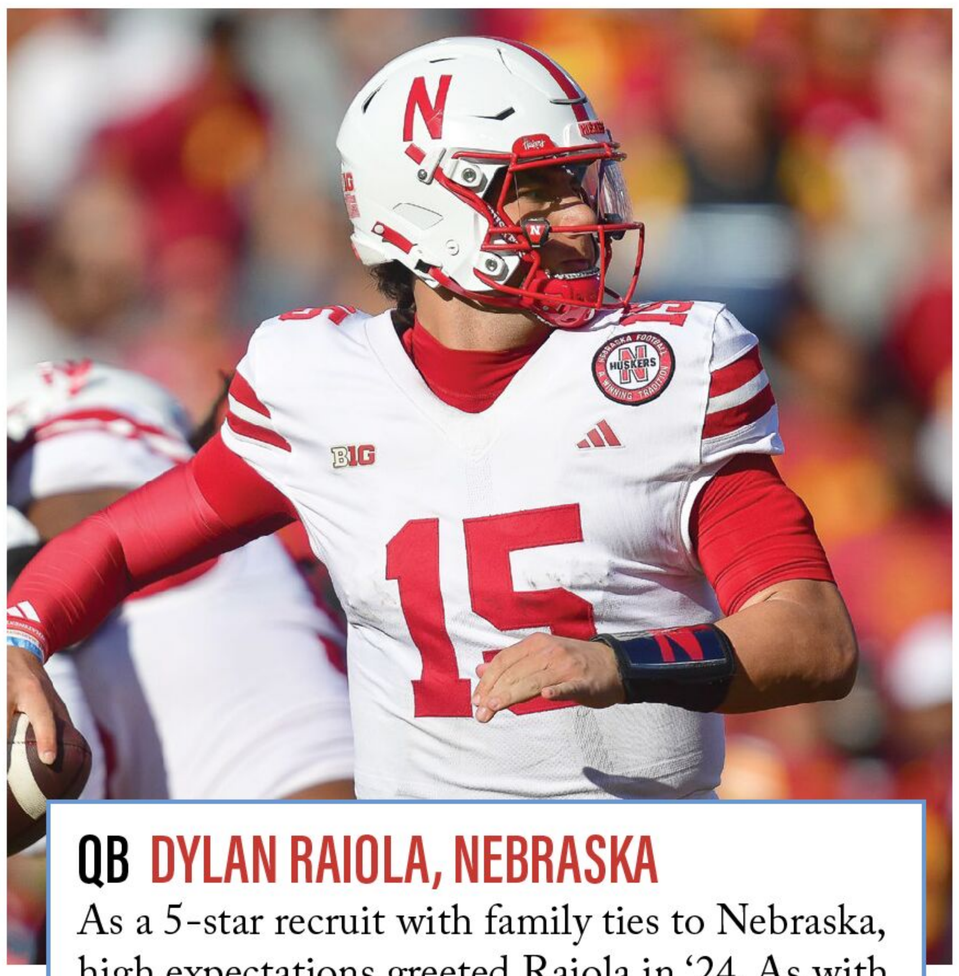
GETTING WARM

Timmy Chang, Hawai'i; Brian Kelly, LSU; Mike Locksley, Maryland; Joe Moorhead, Akron; Ricky Rahne, Old Dominion; Lincoln Riley, USC; Mark Stoops, Kentucky; Justin Wilcox, California

FROM LEFT: JAKE CRANDALL/ADVERTISER; NELSON CHENAULT-IMAGN IMAGES

BREAKOUT PLAYERS

BY STEVEN LASSAN



QB DYLAN RAIOLA, NEBRASKA

As a 5-star recruit with family ties to Nebraska, high expectations greeted Raiola in '24. As with most true freshmen, Raiola's play was inconsistent at times. However, he still threw for 2,819 yards and 13 scores and flashed the talent that made him a can't-miss prospect. Head coach Matt Rhule used the offseason to fortify the pieces around Raiola and hired Dana Holgorsen as the full-time play-caller after an interim stint in '24.

QB DANTE MOORE, OREGON

Moore has big shoes to fill after the past two Oregon quarterbacks (Bo Nix and Dillon Gabriel) finished third in Heisman Trophy voting in back-to-back seasons. The former 5-star recruit is ready for the challenge after using '24 as a redshirt year following his transfer from UCLA. In nine games with the Bruins in '23, Moore threw for 1,610 yards and 11 scores.

QB AUSTIN SIMMONS, OLE MISS

After spending the past two seasons as a backup to Jaxson Dart, Simmons is ready for his chance to pilot the high-powered Ole Miss offense. The Florida native shined in relief of an injured Dart by completing five passes for 64 yards in the Rebels' 28-10 victory over Georgia last November.

QB DEMOND WILLIAMS, WASHINGTON

In what could be a preview of things to come in 2025, Williams threw for 374 yards and four scores and added 48 yards and a touchdown on the ground in the Huskies' one-point loss to Louisville in the Sun Bowl last season. Williams now has a full offseason to develop at the controls of Washington head coach Jedd Fisch's quarterback-friendly offense.

FROM LEFT: GARY A. VASQUEZ-IMAGN IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

RB GIDEON DAVIDSON
Clemson

Davidson has a clear path to a starting job on one of college football's top offenses with Phil Mafah off to the NFL and backup Jay Haynes on the mend from a torn ACL. The true freshman was a consensus top-five running back in the 2025 signing class after running for more than 7,000 yards, amassing a whopping 118 rushing scores, and showing his versatility with more than 600 career receiving yards at the high school level.

WR JADEN GREATHOUSE
Notre Dame

If the last two games of 2024 are a sign of things to come, Greathouse should be a contender for All-America honors. After catching 29 passes through the first 14 games, Greathouse nabbed 13 for 233 yards and three scores combined in playoff contests against Penn State and Ohio State.

WR MIKE MATTHEWS
Tennessee

Tennessee's quarterback situation is a work in progress after Nico Iamaleava's departure. However, head coach Josh Heupel will find ways to produce offense, giving Matthews — a 5-star recruit from the 2024 signing class — ample opportunities to make an impact.

TE LUKE REYNOLDS
Penn State

Tyler Warren leaves big shoes to fill. Reynolds — the No. 1 tight end prospect in the 2024 signing class by 247Sports — is next up at the position.

OL JORDAN SEATON
Colorado

The former 5-star prospect started all 13 games and protected quarterback Shedeur Sanders' blindside, allowing only three sacks in pass protection and earning Freshman All-America honors.

DL EDDRICK HOUSTON
Ohio State

Turnover along the defensive front is one of the biggest issues for head coach Ryan Day in 2025. But those concerns could be minimized if Houston builds on a promising spring to become a difference-maker for the Buckeyes.

DL LT OVERTON
Alabama

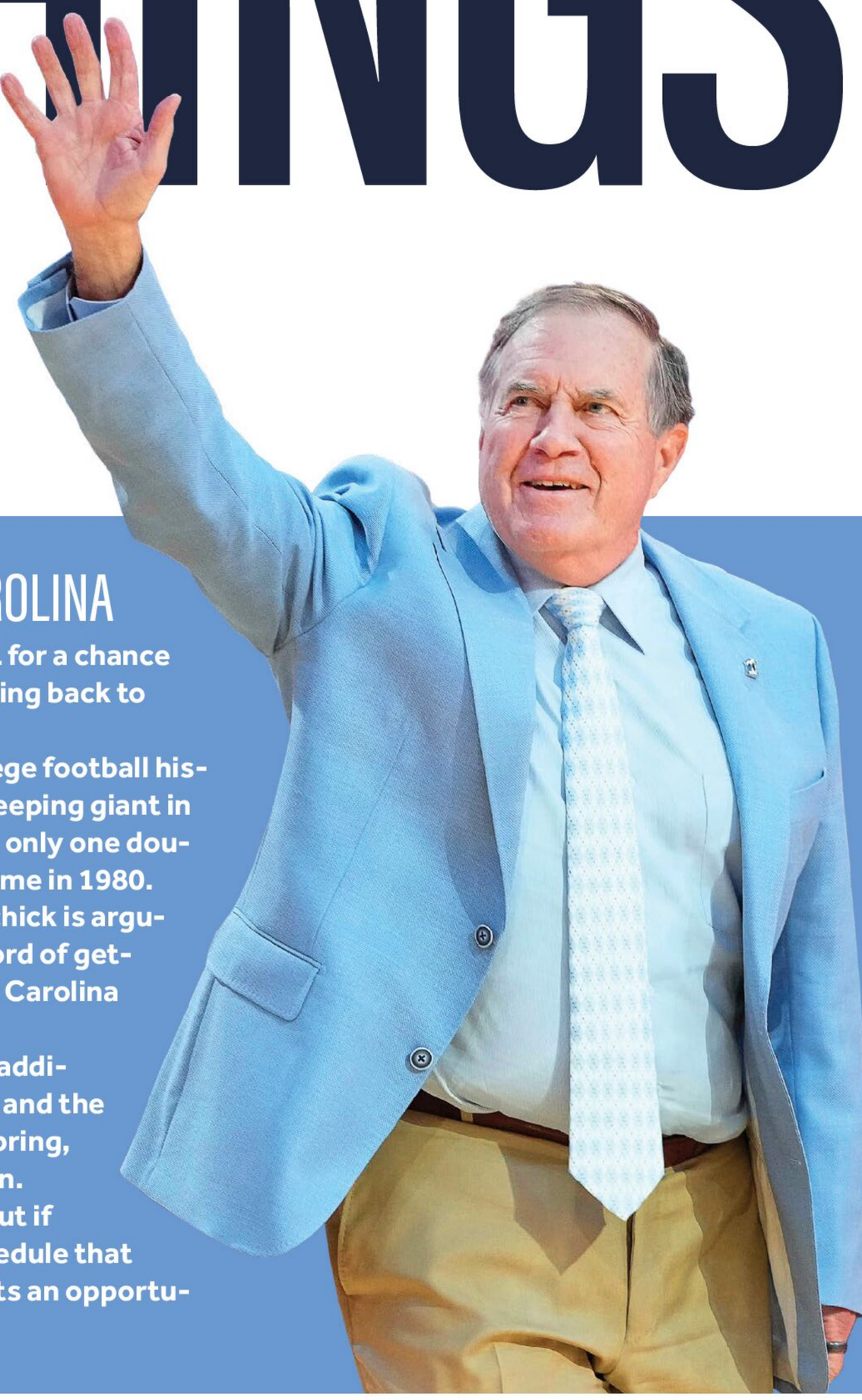
Overton made an impact in his Alabama debut last season, recording 42 tackles and two sacks. The Georgia native led the Crimson Tide defense with 32 quarterback hurries (per PFF), which should translate into more havoc plays with another offseason to develop under coordinator Kane Wommack.

S KJ BOLDEN
Georgia

Georgia's defense returns only three starters, but Kirby Smart has plenty of talent waiting in the wings. Bolden is one of those players poised to emerge as a star. The Georgia native saw action in all 14 games, recording 59 tackles and an interception.

15 THINGS TO WATCH IN 2025

BY STEVEN LASSAN



BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

1. BILL BELICHICK TAKES OVER AT NORTH CAROLINA

"We're on to ... Chapel Hill?" Instead of returning to the NFL for a chance to break Don Shula's all-time wins record, Bill Belichick is going back to school.

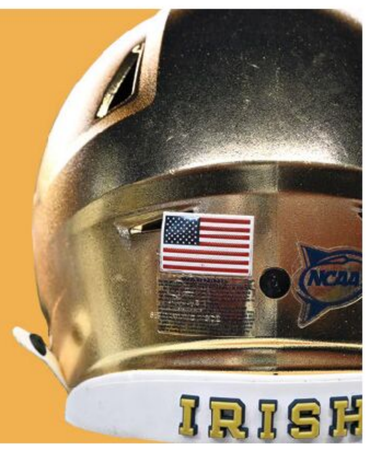
In one of the most surprising (and intriguing) hires in college football history, Belichick takes over a program that most consider a sleeping giant in the ACC. Despite everything in its favor, North Carolina has only one double-digit win season (2015) since 1997. The last ACC title came in 1980.

With 302 all-time victories and six Super Bowl rings, Belichick is arguably the greatest coach in NFL history. And with a track record of getting the most out of players, his arrival could be what North Carolina needs to turn potential into wins.

Belichick reshaped the roster with more than 20 transfer additions, with an emphasis on rebuilding the line of scrimmage and the secondary. Quarterback play was a question mark exiting spring, but South Alabama transfer Gio Lopez solidified the position.

At 73, Belichick isn't in it for the long haul in Chapel Hill. But if he can do a better job at maximizing a talented roster, a schedule that includes only one preseason Top 25 team (Clemson) presents an opportunity to surprise.

2 NOTRE DAME AIMS FOR ANOTHER STEP FORWARD IN 2025



If Notre Dame wasn't a fan of the new 12-team playoff before last season, it certainly was after '24. A Week 2 upset loss to Northern Illinois likely would've kept the Fighting Irish out of the four-team setup. Instead, head coach Marcus Freeman's team reeled off 13 straight victories before falling in the national championship game to Ohio State.

Getting Notre Dame to the title game was a huge step forward for Freeman, but now comes the last step in the process: winning a national championship.

Optimism is high in South Bend. New quarterback CJ Carr is one of the program's most talented signal-callers in recent memory. Also, the offensive line should be among the best in college football, and running back Jeremiyah Love is a Heisman front-runner. The defense will miss coordinator Al Golden and needs to retool a bit at every level. However, a strong foundation remains for a group that limited teams to 15.5 points per game last year.

Carr and the rest of the new faces won't have much time to settle in with an opener at Miami (Fla.). But Texas A&M, USC, Boise State, Pitt, Navy and Syracuse all come to South Bend. If Carr develops as expected, and the defense doesn't miss a beat, the program's first championship since 1988 is a realistic goal in '25.

PENN STATE'S TIME IN THE BIG TEN? 3

The 2024 season represented an important step forward for Penn State. Head coach James Franklin's team played for the Big Ten title, earned the program's first playoff wins (over SMU and Boise State) and came within a late score against Notre Dame of making the national championship.

Thanks to 12 returning starters, including quarterback Drew Allar and the dynamic duo of Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen in the backfield, Penn State is expected to begin a season ranked inside the top five for the first time since 1999. And with Ohio State, Michigan and Oregon all reloading, the Big Ten is there for the Nittany Lions to take.

Allar will benefit from another offseason to work under coordinator Andy Kotelnicki. Kyron Hudson (USC) and Devonte Ross (Troy) arrive from the portal to improve a struggling receiving corps and alleviate the loss of tight end Tyler Warren. Franklin also landed a punch on Ohio State by luring defensive coordinator Jim Knowles to Happy Valley.

This fall isn't a now-or-never chance for Penn State. But with Allar and others passing on the NFL, a favorable schedule and Big Ten rivals rebuilding, everything is aligned for a special season in Happy Valley.

4 GEORGIA VS. TEXAS: THE SEC'S NEW HIGH-STAKES RIVALRY

Alabama-LSU and Georgia-Alabama weren't rivals in the traditional sense, but those two battles loomed large over SEC supremacy (and national title positioning) in recent years.

But thanks to Nick Saban's retirement after 2023, Georgia-Texas has emerged as the newest high-stakes rivalry in the conference. The Bulldogs defeated the Longhorns twice last season, including an overtime thriller in the SEC Championship Game. After Georgia won in Austin in '24, Texas has a chance to return the favor in Athens on Nov. 15. But regardless of what happens in that meeting, these two teams could see each other again in the SEC title game or the playoff.

Kirby Smart's Bulldogs return only seven starters and have more preseason question marks than normal thanks to the hefty roster turnover. But as usual in Athens, talent isn't in short supply. New quarterback Gunner Stockton is poised for a breakout year, and a struggling receiving corps was fortified through the portal.

In Austin, all eyes are on Arch Manning as he takes full control of the Texas offense. After the Longhorns reached the CFP semifinals in back-to-back years, Manning's upside, a loaded roster with few weaknesses and a stingy defense could be what it takes for Texas to return to the top of college football.

continued on page 28

FROM TOP: MARIA LYSAKER-USA TODAY SPORTS; MATTHEW O'HAREN-IMAGN IMAGES

from page 27

5 WHAT'S NEXT FOR DEION SANDERS AND COLORADO?

Heisman winner Travis Hunter and quarterback Shedeur Sanders are off to the NFL. While the Buffaloes are dealing with major transition, one thing remains constant in Boulder: Deion Sanders' team is among the most intriguing in college football.

Sanders restocked the offense through the portal, landing Liberty transfer quarterback Kaidon Salter to bridge the gap to touted freshman Julian Lewis. Help is also on the way at receiver and in the trenches to fortify an offensive line that allowed 43 sacks last year.

Robert Livingston made a massive impact in his first year as defensive coordinator last season, as the Buffaloes held teams to 5.1 yards per snap — down from 6.3 the previous year. Replacing Hunter's game-changing ability and BJ Green II's pass rush (7.5 sacks in '24) won't be easy. But with a solid transfer haul also on the way for the defense, Livingston can build on last season's turnaround.

Sanders has remained steadfast that his future is in Boulder — an idea solidified thanks to a new contract valued around $10 million per season — and now has proof of concept after last year's success. Hunter and Shedeur Sanders will certainly be missed. But with Arizona State, BYU and Iowa State all visiting Boulder in '25, the Buffaloes should factor into the Big 12 title mix once again.

6 EXPECT BIG 12 CHAOS ONCE AGAIN

The new 16-team Big 12 delivered on its chaos potential last season. Nine teams entered the final week with a chance to play for the Big 12 title. Four teams finished 7-2 in league play, while three tied at 6-3. Nine programs went to a bowl, and two of the preseason favorites — Utah and Kansas — finished with losing records.

Don't expect much change in '25. Arizona State returns 16 starters — including rising star quarterback Sam Leavitt — from last year's Big 12 title-winning team. But repeating as conference champion in a league with little separation among programs won't be easy. Steady Iowa State under head coach Matt Campbell and quarterback Rocco Becht will be a factor once again. BYU improved its win total by six games from the previous year and is among the preseason favorites behind quarterback Jake Retzlaff and a physical defense. A couple of close losses knocked Kansas State out of the conference title mix last year, but Chris Klieman's squad is primed to contend behind dynamic quarterback Avery Johnson.

Baylor surged in the second half of '24 and will be a trendy sleeper pick with 13 starters back. A revamped offense with transfer quarterback Devon Dampier puts Utah back into the title mix. Kansas is another team expected to rebound, and TCU will be dangerous behind quarterback Josh Hoover.

And after a reported $10 million offseason spending spree to secure one of college football's top transfer classes, Texas Tech is all in on 2025. In a wide-open conference, the Red Raiders' acquisitions could be enough for them to go from a game back in the title race to hoisting the Big 12 title trophy in December.

7 BIG NAMES ON THE MOVE IN THE QB TRANSFER MARKET

Around 60% of Power 4 teams could start a transfer under center in '25, as several big-time or proven quarterbacks are on the move.

Miami reportedly inked Georgia transfer Carson Beck to a $4 million NIL deal for '25, while Oklahoma dipped into the coordinator ranks (Ben Arbuckle) and quarterback room (John Mateer) at Washington State. Darian Mensah was another highly valued ($4 million per season) transfer, moving from Tulane to Duke. Former 5-star prospects Jackson Arnold (Oklahoma to Auburn) and Conner Weigman (Texas A&M to Houston) are changing campuses, with Group of 5 standouts Devon Dampier (New Mexico to Utah) and Kaidon Salter (Liberty to Colorado) moving up to the power conference ranks. Miller Moss aims to rebound at Louisville under offensive guru Jeff Brohm after he was benched at USC last season. Fernando Mendoza might be the most underrated quarterback transfer after two solid years at California. This fall, he'll play in head coach Curt Cignetti's Indiana offense.

Top FCS signal-caller Mark Gronowski makes the move from South Dakota State to Iowa. Penn State's Beau Pribula transferred to Missouri for a chance to be a full-time starter.

In the spring, Nico Iamaleava transferred from Tennessee to UCLA, with Joey Aguilar departing the Bruins after just one semester to take Iamaleava's place in Knoxville. North Carolina addressed its quarterback need by landing South Alabama standout Gio Lopez.

SAM HODDE/GETTY IMAGES)

8
OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

The bitterness in the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry reached an all-time high last season. The Wolverines stunned the Buckeyes in Columbus as a three-touchdown underdog, and then the two teams traded blows in a postgame fight.

November was a turning point for both teams. Ohio State used that loss as motivation, reeling off four consecutive victories to win the national title. Amid a sluggish debut under new head coach Sherrone Moore, Michigan landed the commitment of 5-star quarterback Bryce Underwood and closed the year with the win over the Buckeyes and a bowl victory over Alabama.

Even with arguably the best offensive player (wide receiver Jeremiah Smith) and defensive player (safety Caleb Downs) returning in college football, repeating as national champs is a huge ask for Ryan Day's team. New quarterback Julian Sayin is talented but has attempted only 12 career passes. The defense will be under construction with only three returning starters under new coordinator Matt Patricia.

How fast Underwood develops looms large for Michigan's hopes of a return to the playoff. But the young quarterback won't have to do it all on his own. The Wolverines have a standout backfield tandem in Jordan Marshall and Justice Hayes, along with a stingy defense returning six starters.

Both Sayin and Underwood should be far along in their development by the Nov. 29 matchup. The implications for that contest are enormous, as Michigan hopes to win its fifth in a row in the series, while Ohio State aims to reclaim its edge.

As if this rivalry needed any more fuel, the storylines going into '25 after last year's meeting show there won't be much of a cooling-off period.

9. WHICH TEAMS COULD BE THIS YEAR'S INDIANA & SMU AS PLAYOFF SURPRISES?

Six teams — Arizona State, Boise State, Indiana, Penn State, SMU and Tennessee — made their first appearance in the College Football Playoff last season.

Which teams could make their debut or emerge as a surprise playoff contender in 2025?

A pair of SEC teams with rising star quarterbacks in South Carolina (LaNorris Sellers) and Florida (DJ Lagway) top the list of candidates. After back-to-back seasons of double-digit victories, Missouri is a sleeper to watch if transfer quarterback Beau Pribula quickly settles in against a favorable schedule. Is this the year Texas A&M finally breaks through? Or could Ole Miss surprise in a rebuilding season?

With quarterback Dylan Raiola poised for a step forward in '25, Nebraska is an obvious candidate out of the Big Ten. Illinois quietly won 10 games last fall and returns 16 starters with a favorable schedule.

The Big 12 has a handful of possibilities, including Kansas State, Utah, Baylor, Iowa State or Texas Tech.

Miami (Fla.) is the No. 1 candidate out of the ACC after just missing the field last fall. But if a team can put together an Indiana-like run and reach the playoff, Louisville or Georgia Tech fit the bill.

NEBRASKA QB DYLAN RAIOLA

continued on page 30

FROM TOP: KYLE ROBERTSON; VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

from page 29

10 ANOTHER ACTIVE YEAR FOR THE COACHING CAROUSEL

College football's coaching carousel spun at a high rate once again following the 2024 season. After 31 jobs changed hands after '23, 30 programs have a new head coach entering '25. The bulk of the changes (23 of 30) came in the Group of 5 ranks, with nearly half of the teams in the MAC (six) and American (six) dealing with change at the top.

The carousel didn't lack intrigue in the power conference ranks, however. This cycle brought homecomings for Scott Frost (UCF) and Rich Rodriguez (West Virginia), Bill Belichick to North Carolina and Barry Odom taking over at Purdue following a successful two-year run at UNLV. Former NFL standout Eddie George (Bowling Green) landed in the MAC, while Michael Vick (Norfolk State) and DeSean Jackson (Delaware State) were hired at FCS programs.

Of the FBS' 136 current head coaches, only 18 were hired at their current job before the '19 season. The pressure to win now has always existed, but it's even more prominent in the NIL era. Winning equals optimism and donations, which translates into resources to retain talent or recruit more through the portal or high school ranks.

With a hot-seat list that includes several SEC jobs, Florida State, Wisconsin, Oklahoma State and Virginia Tech, the rate of change isn't likely to slow after the '25 season.

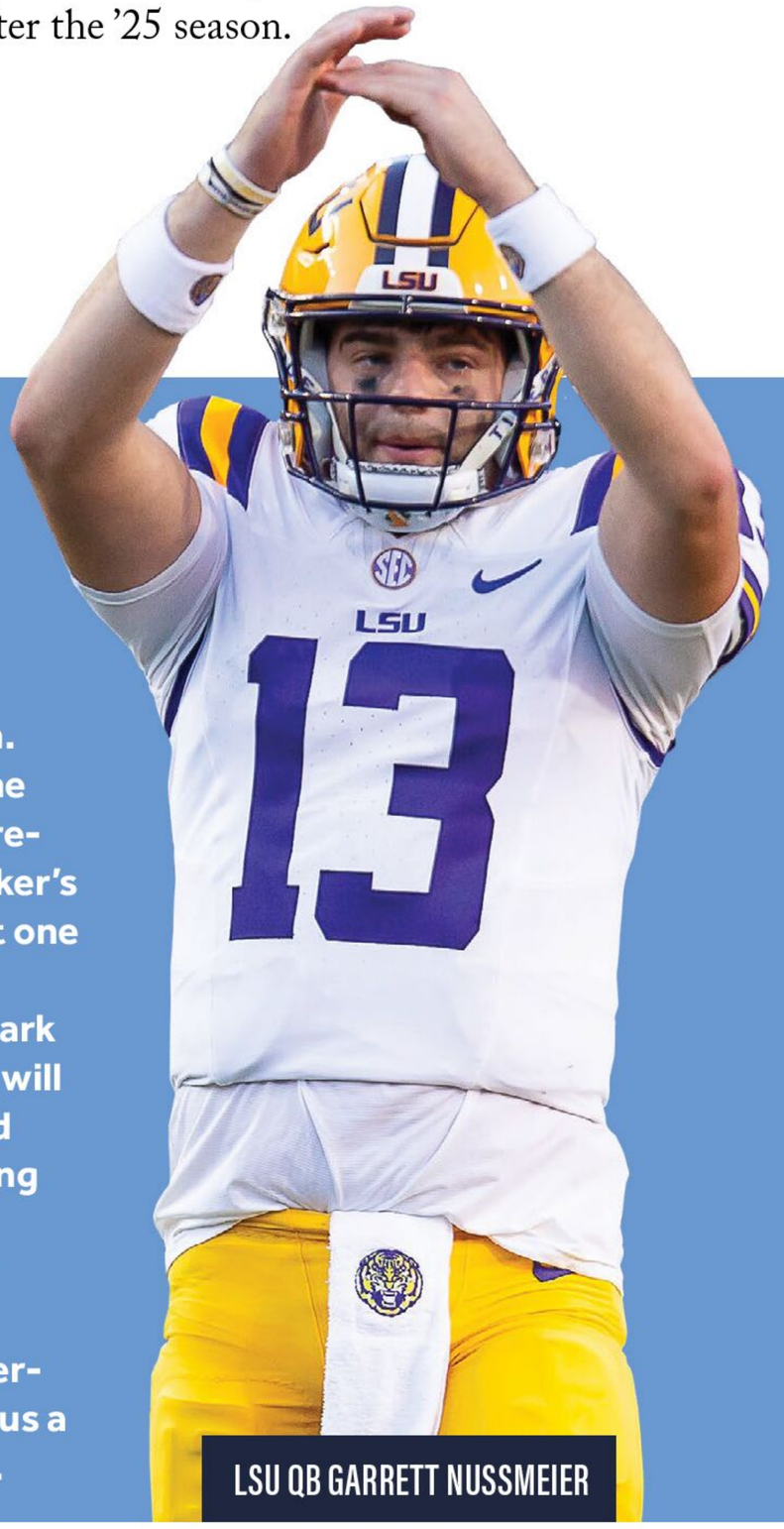
11 PRESSURE BUILDING IN THE SEC

The Big Ten sent shockwaves throughout the Southeast by dislodging the SEC from the top of the college football pyramid in each of the past two seasons. Although the downturn at the top is likely temporary, the transfer portal and NIL have negatively impacted some of the SEC's top teams in retaining depth.

The growing angst in the SEC starts at LSU. Although Brian Kelly is 29-11 since '22, the Bayou Bengals have yet to make a playoff appearance. Quarterback Garrett Nussmeier returns, and there's optimism for a major step forward on defense in coordinator Blake Baker's second year. The program also made a significant investment in NIL resources to attract one of the nation's top portal classes.

The state of Alabama is always interesting. Kalen DeBoer underachieved with a 9-4 mark last year. Replacing Nick Saban wasn't supposed to be easy, but the pressure on DeBoer will significantly grow with another season of fewer than 10 wins. Hugh Freeze has improved the talent level at Auburn, but his seat is beginning to warm following back-to-back losing seasons and an 11-14 overall record.

Last year's 6-7 mark was the second losing season for Oklahoma in three years under Brent Venables. The program took steps to fix its problems, including hiring offensive coordinator Ben Arbuckle and upgrading the roster through the portal — namely, quarterback John Mateer and running back Jaydn Ott. The Sooners hope those adjustments, plus a standout defense, give Venables enough pieces to get back on track in Year 2 in the SEC.



LSU QB GARRETT NUSSMEIER

12 CLEMSON A HEAVY FAVORITE ATOP THE ACC

Clemson's 9-4 record in 2023 — the program's first year with fewer than 10 wins since 2010 — raised plenty of doubts about whether or not Dabo Swinney's team was slipping from the top of college football. The Tigers quickly dismissed those concerns by winning 10 games and the ACC title before falling 38-24 at Texas in the first round of the playoff last season.

Cade Klubnik emerged as one of college football's top quarterbacks in '24 and begins '25 as one of the Heisman front-runners. With an improving and talented group of playmakers at receiver to support Klubnik, along with a defense poised to improve under new coordinator Tom Allen, the Tigers are the heavy preseason favorites in the ACC and a legitimate national title contender. Swinney even dipped into the portal for help at receiver and defensive end.

Miami (Fla.) is likely the biggest challenger to Clemson behind transfer quarterback Carson Beck. SMU was the ACC's biggest surprise in '24 and returns dynamic quarterback Kevin Jennings. However, the Mustangs lost a wealth of experience and talent, making a repeat of last season unlikely.

If the ACC produces another SMU-like surprise contender in '25, Georgia Tech and Louisville stand out as candidates. Florida State's potential rebound after a miserable '24 season, Syracuse's ability to reload after a 10-win campaign and North Carolina's debut under Bill Belichick will impact just how deep this conference is for '25.

DOUG ENGLE/GAINESVILLE SUN

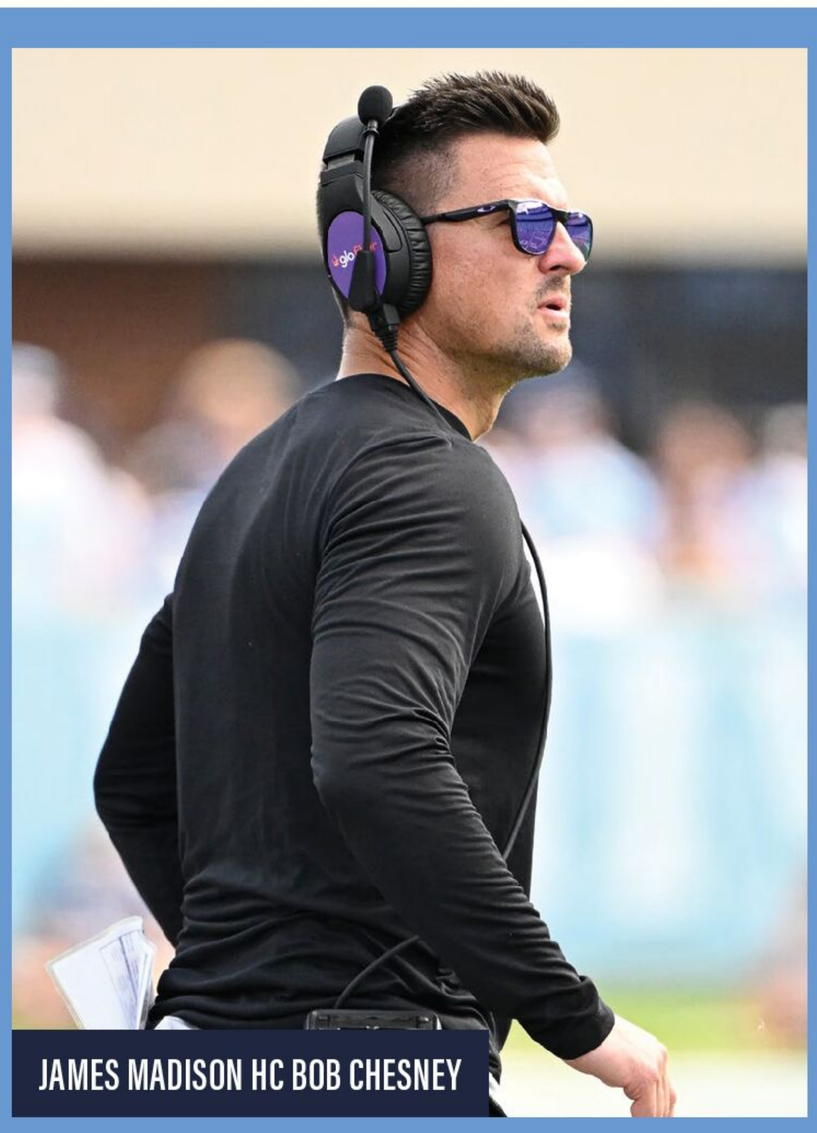
13 SUNSHINE STATE INTRIGUE

The playoff drought for the "Big Three" — Miami, Florida, and Florida State — in the Sunshine State is now at 10 years.

The Seminoles never recovered from the playoff snub in 2023 and slumped to 2-10 — the program's worst record since a 1-10 mark in 1974. Last season's regression placed head coach Mike Norvell squarely on the hot seat in '25. That pressure was evident in a staff overhaul that included new play-callers on offense (Gus Malzahn) and defense (Tony White), along with more than 15 additions from the transfer portal.

Florida seemed poised for a coaching change after early-season blowout losses to Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M. But behind rising star quarterback DJ Lagway, Billy Napier won a November vote of confidence and guided the team to four straight wins to end '24. The Gators should have the best all-around team of Napier's tenure in '25, but Lagway's health will be an ongoing concern after he was limited in spring practice. With a schedule that includes road trips to LSU, Miami (Fla.), Texas A&M and Ole Miss, along with home dates versus Tennessee, Florida State and Texas and the neutral-site affair against Georgia, exceeding last year's eight wins won't be easy.

Miami nearly ended the Sunshine State's playoff drought last year, but a late-season loss to Syracuse kept Mario Cristobal's team out of the 12-team field. Cristobal continues to amass talent in Coral Gables, including Georgia transfer Carson Beck at quarterback and the ACC's No. 1 signing class for the third year in a row.



JAMES MADISON HC BOB CHESNEY

14 CAN ANY TEAM CATCH BOISE STATE IN THE GROUP OF 5 RANKS?

Heisman runner-up Ashton Jeanty took his punishing running style to the NFL, but the path to a spot in the playoff for Group of 5 teams still runs through Boise State. The Broncos are a heavy favorite in the Mountain West and have marquee matchups against South Florida in Week 1 and Notre Dame on Oct. 4.

If Boise State falls short, the champion of the American is likely to benefit. South Florida, Army, Navy, Memphis, Tulane and UTSA provide the league with a deep group of contenders.

Massive attrition through graduation or the transfer portal hit all of the top contenders in the Sun Belt. James Madison is Athlon's preseason favorite, and Bob Chesney's team has non-conference opportunities at Louisville and Liberty to build a playoff case. In the MAC, Toledo, Miami (Ohio), Ohio and Buffalo are projected to lead the charge for the league's first playoff bid. And despite both teams navigating major turnover from '24, Liberty and WKU are the preseason favorites in Conference USA.

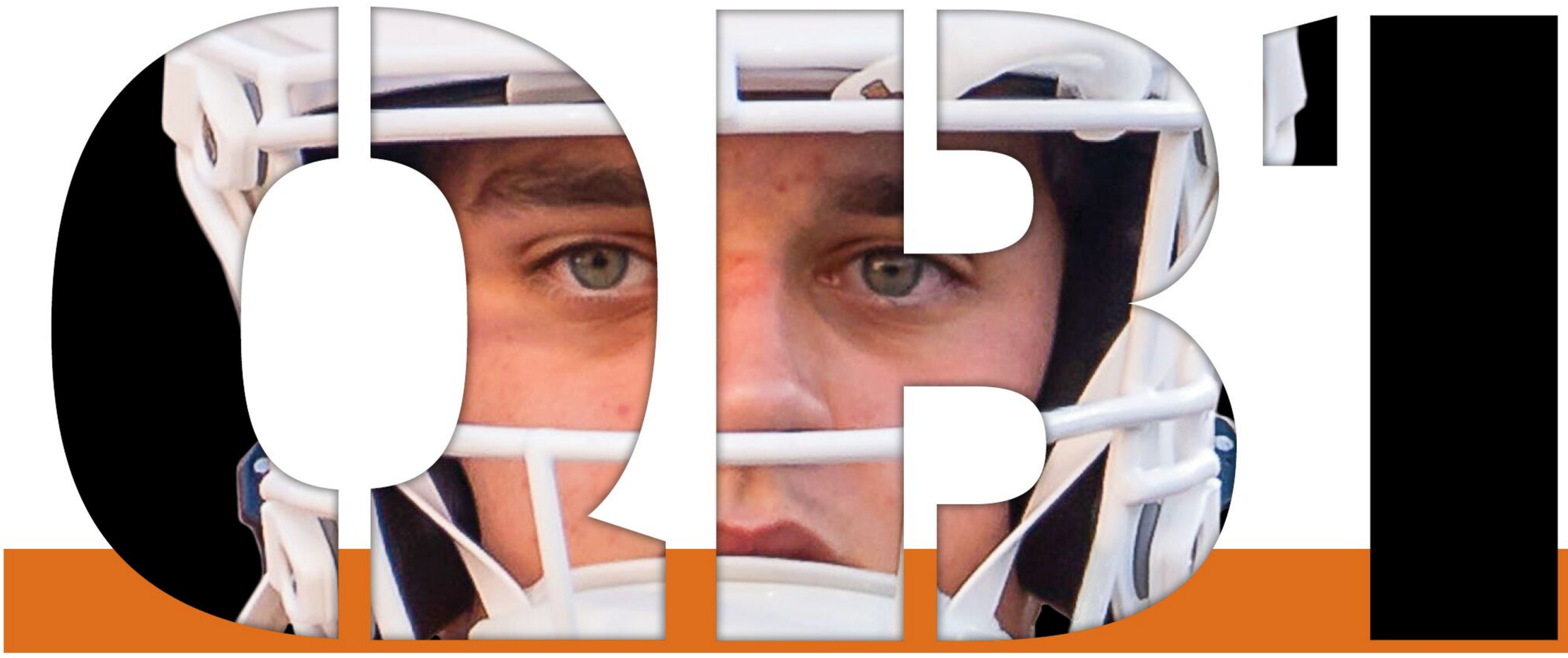
15 CHANGES COMING TO THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF?

Although the first 12-team playoff was a massive success, changes could be coming this fall. Conference commissioners met throughout the offseason to explore a tweak to the seeding process. Instead of conference champions guaranteed a top-four spot, a switch to a straight seeding model to match the College Football Playoff selection committee's top 25 is under discussion.

Additionally, the setup for '26 and beyond remains unsettled. Expansion to 14 or 16 teams, as well as a set number of guaranteed spots for power conferences, is under consideration.

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

ARCH MANNING



IS READY FOR HIS CLOSE-UP

BY BRIAN DAVIS

AUSTIN, Texas — Matt's El Rancho is the Tex-Mex joint you imagine whenever daydreaming about visiting Austin. Matt Martinez started by selling homemade tamales from a wooden pushcart in 1923. Now his family restaurant holds more than 500 patrons down on South Lamar Boulevard.

On a typical Saturday night, the locals, tourists, hipsters and high-falutin' types all collide and hobnob while waiting for margaritas, Bob Armstrong dip and Matt's famous Asadero tacos.

One particular Saturday night in May 2024, some Texas Longhorns football players were seated at a six-top near the bar. Throughout the course of dinner, grown men approached the table in steady, assembly-line fashion. Total strangers interrupted the players' dinner and asked for autographs. Two men, both well over 50, each made one particular Longhorn stand up and take awkward selfies. Oh, we're interrupting? Sorry, not sorry. Look at the camera. Everybody say "Hook 'em!"

Arch Manning obliged every request, no matter how intrusive. Such is the life of a star quarterback in a college football-crazy town.

"Yeah, that's been tough," Manning says. "I think I have good people to lean on for that type of stuff. But I can't quit doing normal things. I'm gonna go eat dinner with my buddies and be a normal college kid."

By this point, Manning is used to interruptions at dinner — and just about everywhere else. But in 2024, Texas was still Quinn Ewers' team, and head coach Steve Sarkisian made sure everybody knew it.

Not anymore, though. Archibald Charles Manning, who turned 20 in April, is now QB1 at Texas. He's done what is arguably the hardest thing any college athlete can do nowadays: He waited for his turn.

"Yeah, it was tough. I mean, it's tough in this age. But I think, I hope it pays off," Manning says. "There's nowhere else I want to be. I want to be at Texas. I got friends here. Love this place. So I want to be the quarterback of the University of Texas. Sometimes it's worth the wait."

Longhorns fans have waited for this moment, too. Heck, a lot of them wanted to throw Ewers overboard last season and start the Manning era ASAP. When Ewers missed two-plus games with a strained abdominal injury in September, Manning went off, throwing for eight touchdowns and rushing for two more. That experience gave him a taste of big-time college football and left him wanting more — much more.

"The speed of the game," Manning says of what he learned. "It's also a good way for me to play in front of people, in front of 100,000." All told, Manning threw for 939 yards in 10 games last season with nine touchdowns and two interceptions, completing 67.8% of his throws.

Now that name, image and likeness (NIL) deals allow for players' names on the backs of jerseys, Manning's No. 16 has been on fire for two years. "It's not even close," one UT marketing official says. "There's a wide gulf between him and everybody else."

It wasn't just that Manning was throwing deep balls and dazzling fans with TikTok-ready touchdown dances. It was how he showed incredible speed, daring and a dash of bravado with a 67-yard madcap romp against UTSA. Oh, Ewers saw it, too. The three-year starter who finished with the third-most passing yards in UT history hustled back into the lineup against Oklahoma despite not being fully healthy.

PHOTO CREDIT

"It says in the Bible, 'Iron sharpens iron.' So it was good for me and him to get to work together," Ewers said at the NFL Scouting Combine this spring. "I'm glad that he was part of our team, and I'm glad I had to hear about it as well."

Said Manning, "It's probably pretty annoying having me as a backup, just with all the media stuff, but he handled it like a champ. He was so good to me along the way."

Sarkisian probably was annoyed with the offseason second-guessing after he didn't utilize Manning's running ability during Texas' postseason run. Manning came off the bench and scored on a dazzling 15-yard run to ignite a road win against Texas A&M. But when the CFP started, Sarkisian had made up his mind — he was sticking with Ewers.

It made sense. Ewers was the quarterback who suffered a broken collarbone, a busted shoulder, a torn oblique and an ankle injury from 2022-24. Still, he had enough in the tank to lead Texas to the 2023 Big 12 title and its first playoff appearance, a push that landed Sarkisian a contract extension akin to winning the Mega Millions jackpot. You don't forget that kind of toughness and loyalty.

But Ewers was also rather immobile in the pocket last December, something everyone could see. More Manning, even just a little bit, would have probably kept Ohio State's defense honest. Instead, the Buckeyes pinned their ears back on four straight plays from the 1-yard line in the Cotton Bowl. Jack Sawyer's strip sack/fumble recovery/83-yard touchdown run was the final nail in the Buckeyes' 28-14 semifinal win.

In the CFP, Manning had three rushes for no yards against Clemson in the first round and didn't play against Arizona State. He picked up eight yards on a fourth-and-1 keeper against Ohio State but appeared to get rocked. The quarterback went to the sideline and never returned. Speculation quickly turned to whether Manning had suffered a concussion. "Yeah, I mean, that guy hit me pretty hard, but I was fine," Manning says.

Once the offseason officially began, the transition finally began as well. "This guy's got charisma," Sarkisian said of Manning on former Texas QB Colt McCoy's podcast. "You can feel it. And that's not a knock against Quinn. Everybody leads differently. But he's got something about him that guys gravitate to. That's always a great thing to have as a quarterback."

> THIS GUY'S GOT CHARISMA. YOU CAN FEEL IT. ... HE'S GOT SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT GUYS GRAVITATE TO. THAT'S ALWAYS A GREAT THING TO HAVE AS A QUARTERBACK.
>
> — Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian

Sarkisian is adamant that he hasn't spoken with Manning's uncles, Peyton and Eli, about their cover-boy nephew. Arch apparently hasn't leaned on his family members for too much football advice, either. "I think once I got to college, I'm just working with the coaches," Manning says. "If I go home, I'll go throw with my dad [Cooper]."

Just like Ewers did, Manning is leaning on UT quarterbacks coach AJ Milwee. Sarkisian also hired former West Virginia head coach Neal Brown as a special assistant. Brown has been working extensively with Manning on leadership. One of the biggest pieces of advice has been for Manning to get to know everybody. Eat breakfast with different teammates every day. Just be yourself. "Take the guys out to eat, stuff like that, just to get more chemistry on the team," Manning says.

Running back Quintrevion Wisner said from the moment they came in together before the 2023 season, "Arch always had that leader mindset. His leadership role definitely stepped up a bunch this year, but he knows that, and he's taking full effect on it."

Here's where Manning the down-home kid can be Manning the superstar. He can always pick up the tab.

Manning told reporters previously that he "wasn't allowed" to have NIL until he became the starter, according to a promise he made to grandfather Archie. Nobody knows where some of these NIL values originate, and it should be clear that what you see floating around online are educated guesses. On3 pegged Manning's NIL "value" around $6.5 million. Whatever the total value is, Manning is certainly ready to cash in.

Manning unveiled a partnership with Red Bull and later filmed a funny ad for Uber featuring Archie, Cooper and himself all riding around Austin in a driverless car. It's believed that Manning received anywhere from $50,000 to $60,000 for being on the cover of EA Sports' "College Football 25." Midway through spring football, he appeared in a social media campaign for Vuori, the athletic apparel company.

Manning could already retire as a rock star if those pesky SEC games didn't get in the way. Everybody loves the backup — until they don't. That famous last name only goes so far.

"The boos? Because the boos are going to come here pretty soon, too," Sarkisian says. "I love our fans. They love the backup quarterback, but they hate interceptions. So those are coming."

Is Manning ready for boos? "Hell yeah," he said, quickly adding "sorry" for the language. "I mean, I've learned that. You can't ride the emotional roller coaster. You just gotta stay straight. It's great when you win. It's not great when you lose, but you've just got to keep that same mindset."

CLOSING THE GAP

COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S BALANCE OF POWER HAS SHIFTED DRAMATICALLY

BY STEVEN GODFREY

Remember "SEC Speed?"

Just weeks after then-No. 1 Ohio State won college football's latest "Game of the Century" against then-No. 2 Michigan to end the 2006 regular season, the favored Buckeyes were blown out by a Florida Gators team that seemed faster, more physical and meaner at every position.

While the entire college football world spent that November fixated on the marquee Midwest matchup — and a potential second encounter in the BCS National Championship Game — the Gators of the SEC suddenly grabbed the attention of the nation by running around, past and oftentimes right through the Buckeyes in a 41-14 rout to claim the national title.

For almost the next two decades, the SEC would tower over college football. Head coach Urban Meyer would win multiple national titles at Florida, and Nick Saban would turn Alabama into the greatest dynasty in the sport's history. And when those two names weren't hoisting trophies, a rotation of SEC programs (LSU, Auburn, Georgia) and other schools south of the Mason-Dixon Line (Florida State, Clemson) were trading national championships, often facing off against one another.

The only reprieve for the Big Ten came when the Buckeyes lured Meyer, an Ohio native, out of a feigned retirement and back home to Columbus, where he promptly discarded the league's antiquated, unwritten rules of gentlemanly recruiting and built a national champion in 2014.

But even with Big Ten programs attempting to modernize their personnel, the South still ruled. Following Ohio State's 2014 title at the beginning of the College Football Playoff era, an SEC and/or Southern school won every national championship for the next eight seasons. Only once, when Alabama beat Ohio State 52-24 in 2020, did a Big Ten school even make the CFP final.

So why is a guy like Doug Lesmerises so confident?

"We'll look back at this era of SEC and Southern dominance as a blip," says Lesmerises, a longtime sportswriter covering the Big Ten and Ohio State. "Before the BCS, college football success was geographically balanced. And now it will be again. Michigan and Ohio State winning the last two national titles isn't a fluke. This is the new normal."

ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Lesmerises hosts "Kings of the North," a show dedicated to firing back at a generation of Southern dominance in college football and the associated narrative. "It doesn't necessarily mean the North and the Big Ten will dominate. It just means the playing field has been leveled, and it's never going back to the way it was," he says. "The South better suck it up and get used to it."

In the past two national championship games, Michigan and Ohio State defeated Washington and Notre Dame, respectively, boxing out the SEC. Add in the unavoidable context of how college football is changing off the field, and suddenly the Big Ten looks a lot more formidable entering the next era of the sport.

To see it on the field, take a look at how Ohio State's defenders blew up Texas' goal-to-go drive in the Cotton Bowl/CFP semifinal last year. Ohio State safety Caleb Downs, a former Alabama player, sniffed out a simple toss play to Texas running back Quintrevion Wisner on second-and-goal. The lost yardage helped set up a fourth-and-goal on which Ohio State's Jack Sawyer forced a fumble and returned it for a touchdown **(above, left)**, helping seal the win for the Buckeyes and blocking the SEC from the title game again.

Downs' play — and the fact that he did it in a scarlet and grey uniform — illustrates the impossible-to-ignore change that the transfer portal and Name, Image and Likeness rights have caused. During any of the Saban title seasons at Bama, Downs would've been in Tuscaloosa, but the new market of unrestricted "free agency" let him leave Bama for a better payday at Ohio State. The hundreds of players like Downs moving between the SEC and Big Ten, as well as the rest of the FBS, is creating a newfound parity in the sport.

If there's a short and quick explanation for the South's dominant run for two decades, it's basic geography. More elite players hail from warm-weather states like Florida, Texas and Georgia than anywhere in the traditional Big Ten footprint. Accordingly, the "old ways" of acquiring personnel via non-compensated scholarships and active penalties against transferring meant that the South could enjoy a stocked pond, and keep every fish it caught. But the old ways are no longer applicable.

One way to overcome a geographic disadvantage is to simply outbid your competitors, which an increasing number of Big Ten programs have started doing via NIL. College football's black market of "bag men" is defunct, and now that it's out in the open, schools whose boosters might've been unwilling to spend large amounts of untraceable cash have a legitimate means of fundraising to attract talent.

> **Before the BCS, college football success was geographically balanced. And now it will be again. Michigan and Ohio State winning the last two national titles isn't a fluke.**
>
> **THIS IS THE NEW NORMAL.**
>
> — Doug Lesmerises

"Now that things are above board, there's no question that Michigan, Ohio State, Notre Dame, Oregon and even USC are financially strong enough to have one of the highest-paid rosters in college football," says Steve Wiltfong, On3's vice president of national recruiting. "And they're doing it. Michigan, they didn't fool around at quarterback this year. They went into the portal and paid a lot of money for the best player in the country."

That player — 5-star quarterback Bryce Underwood — flipped to the Wolverines from LSU.

"That doesn't happen five years ago or maybe even three years ago," Wiltfong says. "The above-board paying of players certainly has benefited the Big Ten compared to the past, where we know it wasn't a fair game."

For Lesmerises, it feels like a sea change. "Of course the SEC is closer to more great high school talent. Beyond that, every advantage has evaporated in this new era of permissibly paying players and the transfer portal," he says. "NIL has activated the donor class in the Big Ten, which has bigger cities and more than enough money to compete."

According to analyst Parker Fleming of CFB Graphs, recent data shows that other leagues are catching up. In 2019, the SEC enjoyed a non-conference winning percentage of 69.6% and an average margin of victory of 8.43 points. In the past two seasons, the SEC has won just 54.5% of non-conference games by an average of 4.13 points per game.

Does that mean the SEC is doomed? The SEC certainly doesn't believe so. "Ohio State was the best team in the country last year when it mattered most, no doubt. Best players in the best position to win," one SEC assistant says. "Michigan was a different situation. A lot of coaches think that [Rose Bowl] was one of the worst-coached games of Saban's career, and that if Bama calls a better game, they crush Washington in that title game.

"This idea that the SEC can't win in the portal era is ridiculous. The schools in this league invented aggressive recruiting."

But they're not the only ones using it. "I think it's a hell of a lot easier to convince boosters to throw money into NIL," a Big Ten assistant says. "I think Indiana's success last season woke everyone up in this league. … A lot of coaches in this league think Illinois could've won a game in the playoff last year."

"I wouldn't rush to judgment after one playoff selection," one SEC coordinator says. "But if you look at their league and our league, and take the best, most complete roster leaving the spring, it's probably Texas against Penn State. A few years ago, that would've been a Saban or [Kirby] Smart team with a significant advantage. I think Penn State and Texas, right now, would be a pretty close game. And that's saying something."

ACC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. CLEMSON TIGERS
2. MIAMI HURRICANES
3. SMU MUSTANGS
4. LOUISVILLE CARDINALS
5. GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS
6. DUKE BLUE DEVILS
7. FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES
8. PITT PANTHERS
9. NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS
10. NC STATE WOLFPACK
11. VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES
12. BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES
13. SYRACUSE ORANGE
14. VIRGINIA CAVALIERS
15. CAL GOLDEN BEARS
16. WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS
17. STANFORD CARDINAL

ACC CHAMPIONSHIP

CLEMSON OVER MIAMI

ALL-ACC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	CADE KLUBNIK	Clemson
RB	ISAAC BROWN	Louisville
RB	JAMAL HAYNES	Georgia Tech
AP	DESMOND REID	Pitt
WR	ANTONIO WILLIAMS	Clemson
WR	BRYANT WESCO JR.	Clemson
WR	CHRIS BELL	Louisville
TE	JUSTIN JOLY	NC State
OL	KEYLAN RUTLEDGE	Georgia Tech
OL	FRANCIS MAUIGOA	Miami (Fla.)
OL	BLAKE MILLER	Clemson
OL	BRIAN PARKER II	Duke
OL	PJ WILLIAMS	SMU

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	T.J. PARKER	Clemson
DL	PETER WOODS	Clemson
DL	RUEBEN BAIN JR.	Miami (Fla.)
DL	DARRELL JACKSON JR.	Florida State
LB	KYLE EFFORD	Georgia Tech
LB	KYLE LOUIS	Pitt
LB	WADE WOODAZ	Clemson
LB	RASHEEM BILES	Pitt
CB	AVIEON TERRELL	Clemson
CB	CHANDLER RIVERS	Duke
S	ISAIAH NWOKOBIA	SMU
S	TERRY MOORE	Duke

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	COLLIN ROGERS	SMU
P	JACK STONEHOUSE	Syracuse
KR	KEELAN MARION	Miami (Fla.)
PR	TUCKER HOLLOWAY	Virginia Tech

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Gasparilla: Virginia Tech vs. Missouri
Holiday: Florida State vs. Washington
Fenway: NC State vs. Army
Pinstripe: Pitt vs. Indiana
Pop-Tarts: Louisville vs. BYU
Military: North Carolina vs. Navy
Sun: Duke vs. Utah
Gator: SMU vs. Texas A&M
Duke's Mayo: Georgia Tech vs. Ole Miss
College Football Playoff First Round: Miami (Fla.) vs. Georgia
Orange (CFP quarterfinals): Clemson vs. Georgia

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

CAL
Offense: New: Bryan Harsin
Old: Mike Bloesch
Defense: New: Terrence Brown, Vic So'oto
Old: Peter Sirmon

CLEMSON
Defense: New: Tom Allen, Nick Eason
Old: Wes Goodwin

FLORIDA STATE
Offense: New: Gus Malzahn
Old: Alex Atkins
Defense: New: Tony White
Old: Adam Fuller

GEORGIA TECH
Defense: New: Blake Gideon
Old: Tyler Santucci

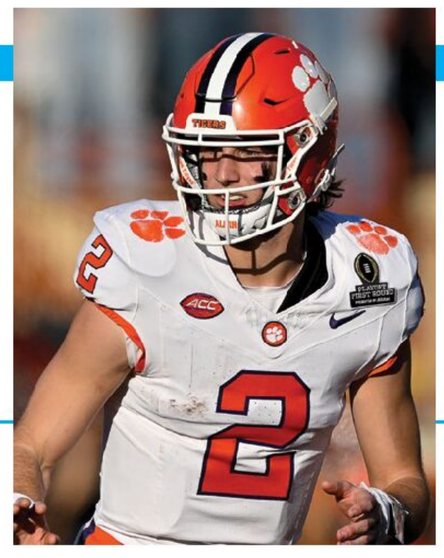
MIAMI (FLA.)
Defense: New: Corey Hetherman
Old: Lance Guidry

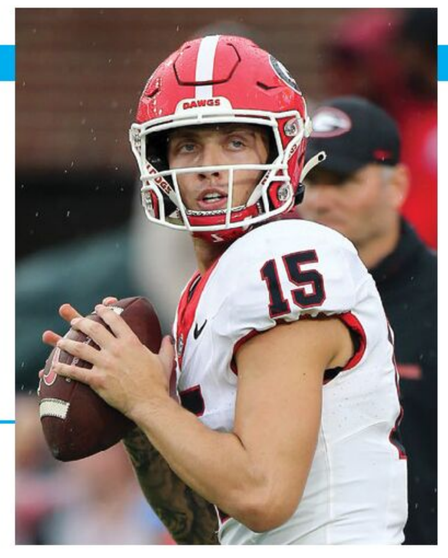
NORTH CAROLINA
Offense: New: Freddie Kitchens
Old: Chip Lindsey
Defense: New: Steve Belichick
Old: Geoff Collins

NC STATE
Offense: New: Kurt Roper
Old: Robert Anae
Defense: New: D.J. Eliot, Charlton Warren
Old: Tony Gibson

VIRGINIA TECH
Offense: New: Philip Montgomery
Old: Tyler Bowen
Defense: New: Sam Siefkes
Old: Chris Marve

WAKE FOREST
Offense: New: Rob Ezell
Old: Warren Ruggiero
Defense: New: Scottie Hazelton
Old: Brad Lambert





CADE KLUBNIK, CLEMSON
CARSON BECK, MIAMI (FLA.)

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Carson Beck	QB	Miami (Fla.)	Georgia
	Cam Ward provided the blueprint for Beck, who eschewed the draft to join the Canes.			
2.	Darian Mensah	QB	Duke	Tulane
	Duke reportedly paid up to add Mensah, who wowed in his lone year as a starter.			
3.	Miller Moss	QB	Louisville	USC
	Moss, who flashed at times with USC, is the Cardinals' latest transfer under center.			
4.	Duce Robinson	WR	Florida State	USC
	The former No. 1 tight end in his class will be an impact weapon for the Noles.			
5.	Eric Rivers	WR	Georgia Tech	FIU
	After a breakout season, Rivers will help fill the void left by Eric Singleton Jr.			
6.	Will Heldt	DL	Clemson	Purdue
	A rare portal addition for Dabo Swinney, Heldt adds to an intimidating front seven.			
7.	James Williams	DL	Florida State	Nebraska
	Williams' arrival is integral to the Seminoles' reworked defensive front.			
8.	Xavier Lucas	CB	Miami (Fla.)	Wisconsin
	Lucas' transfer may have caused a stir, but he fills a position of need.			
9.	Jeremiah Wilson	CB	Florida State	Houston
	A ball hawk with two career pick-6s, Wilson is back in the ACC.			
10.	David Blay Jr.	DL	Miami (Fla.)	Louisiana Tech
	Blay logged a team-high six sacks last season for Tech.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Miami (Fla.) (13)
2. Florida State (20)
3. Clemson (23)
4. Georgia Tech (24)
5. SMU (31)
6. Duke (34)
7. NC State (36)
8. Virginia Tech (39)
9. Stanford (47)
10. Syracuse (49)
11. North Carolina (50)
12. Pitt (55)
13. Cal (56)
14. Virginia (57)
15. Boston College (59)
16. Wake Forest (63)
17. Louisville (67)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 30	LSU at Clemson
Aug. 31	Notre Dame at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 4	Miami (Fla.) at Florida State
Oct. 17	Louisville at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 18	Georgia Tech at Duke
Oct. 18	SMU at Clemson
Nov. 1	Miami (Fla.) at SMU
Nov. 14	Clemson at Louisville
Nov. 22	Duke at North Carolina
Nov. 22	Louisville at SMU
Nov. 29	Clemson at South Carolina
Nov. 29	Georgia Tech vs. Georgia (Atlanta)

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	J-K Sagapolutele	QB	Cal	★★★★★	20
2.	Tylon Lee	EDGE	Florida State	★★★★★	24
3.	Hayden Lowe	EDGE	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★★	27
4.	Dramodd Odoms	OT	SMU	★★★★	43
5.	Amare Adams	DL	Clemson	★★★★	53
6.	Ousmane Kromah	RB	Florida State	★★★★	58
7.	Joshua Moore	WR	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	63
8.	Bryce Baker	QB	North Carolina	★★★★	65
9.	Kellen Wiley Jr.	LB	Miami (Fla.)	★★★★	74
10.	Kevin Wynn	DL	Florida State	★★★★	91

Rankings per On3

FROM LEFT: JEROME MIRON-IMAGN IMAGES; PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 56 | ACC PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Eagles head coach Bill O'Brien still has a decision to make at quarterback. He could go with returning starter Grayson James, who took over in November last season after Thomas Castellanos was benched. Or, he could change gears and go with Alabama transfer Dylan Lonergan. Both players looked strong in spring camp, and O'Brien has yet to name a starter.

The Eagles have some intriguing talent at a number of key positions. At running back, look for the tandem of Turbo Richard and Jordan McDonald. The latter is healthy and could become one of BC's most explosive backs in years. In the receiving corps, Lewis Bond had 67 receptions last season, and Reed Harris is a 6-foot-5 wideout who exploded at the end of the season with some highlight-reel catches

The biggest question for the offense is the line, which will need to replace three starters from last season.

DEFENSE It's going to be a tall task to replace All-America defensive end Donovan Ezeiruaku, who finished last season with 16.5 sacks. Quintayvious Hutchins had a solid season and will need to step up as a leader on the line. Daveon Crouch, who missed the spring but had a monster Pinstripe Bowl with 14 tackles, will lead the linebacker room.

The real strength of the defense is the secondary. Cornerback Amari Jackson, a senior, will return after missing most of last season with a knee injury. Max Tucker and Ashton McShane, both of whom started a majority of last year, will join him at cornerback.

The safeties could be among the best in the conference. KP Price has developed into a veteran playmaker who hits hard and seemingly is rarely out of place. A combination of Carter Davis and Omar Thornton at the free safety spot should give defensive coordinator Tim Lewis a solid group.

SPECIALISTS Boston College finished dead last in the country last year in average yards per punt. They addressed that deficiency with the addition of freshman Andy Quinn of Ireland and Yale punter Shamus Florio. Luca Lombardo should be the primary placekicker. FCS Campbell transfer VJ Wilkins could handle returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS There certainly is a lot of talent at Boston College, and as O'Brien showed last year, he's more than capable of maximizing what he has. Questions on both lines could be the Achilles heel for this team, but if players can emerge up front, the Eagles can be a sneaky team in the ACC in 2025.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 ACC)

Sept. 2	at Florida State	W	28-13
Sept. 7	Duquesne	W	56-0
Sept. 14	at Missouri	L	21-27
Sept. 21	Michigan State	W	23-19
Sept. 28	WKU	W	21-20
Oct. 5	at Virginia	L	14-24
Oct. 17	at Virginia Tech	L	21-42
Oct. 25	Louisville	L	27-31
Nov. 9	Syracuse	W	37-31
Nov. 16	at SMU	L	28-38
Nov. 23	North Carolina	W	41-21
Nov. 30	Pitt	W	34-23
Dec. 28	vs. Nebraska #	L	15-20

#Pinstripe Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Fordham
Sept. 6	at Michigan State
Sept. 13	at Stanford
Sept. 27	Cal
Oct. 4	at Pitt
Oct. 11	Clemson
Oct. 18	UConn
Oct. 25	at Louisville
Nov. 1	Notre Dame
Nov. 8	SMU
Nov. 15	Georgia Tech
Nov. 29	at Syracuse

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Marcus Upton, S	★★★
2.	Robert Smith Jr., IOL	★★★
3.	Omarion Davis, S	★★★
4.	Micah Amedee, DL	★★★
5.	Dawson Pough, WR	★★★
6.	Semaj Fleming, ATH	★★★
7.	Bryce Lewis, TE	★★★
8.	TJ Green, S	★★★
9.	Mekhi Dodd, RB	★★★
10.	Ashton Cunningham, CB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bill O'Brien • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year)
Career Record: 22-15 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Will Lawing
Defensive Coordinator: Tim Lewis • Location: Chestnut Hill, Mass.
Stadium: Alumni Stadium (44,500)

LEWIS BOND

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"It could be a tricky second season for this staff. ... Before they were hit by the portal, they were in pretty good shape, and right now they still look like a really effective run-based offense. They were really effective at working downhill last year. They have to keep that going specifically because of the QB change. ... They need [Dylan] Lonergan to click in that system quickly, and they also need to build a more consistent defense. They were really opportunistic and created a lot of turnovers, but they're not deep or really talented in one particular unit. ... They're a lot like Syracuse in that they exceeded the first-year expectations in a rebuild, but they're suffering more losses now. This looks like it could be a season with fewer wins while they build for a more consistent long-term future."

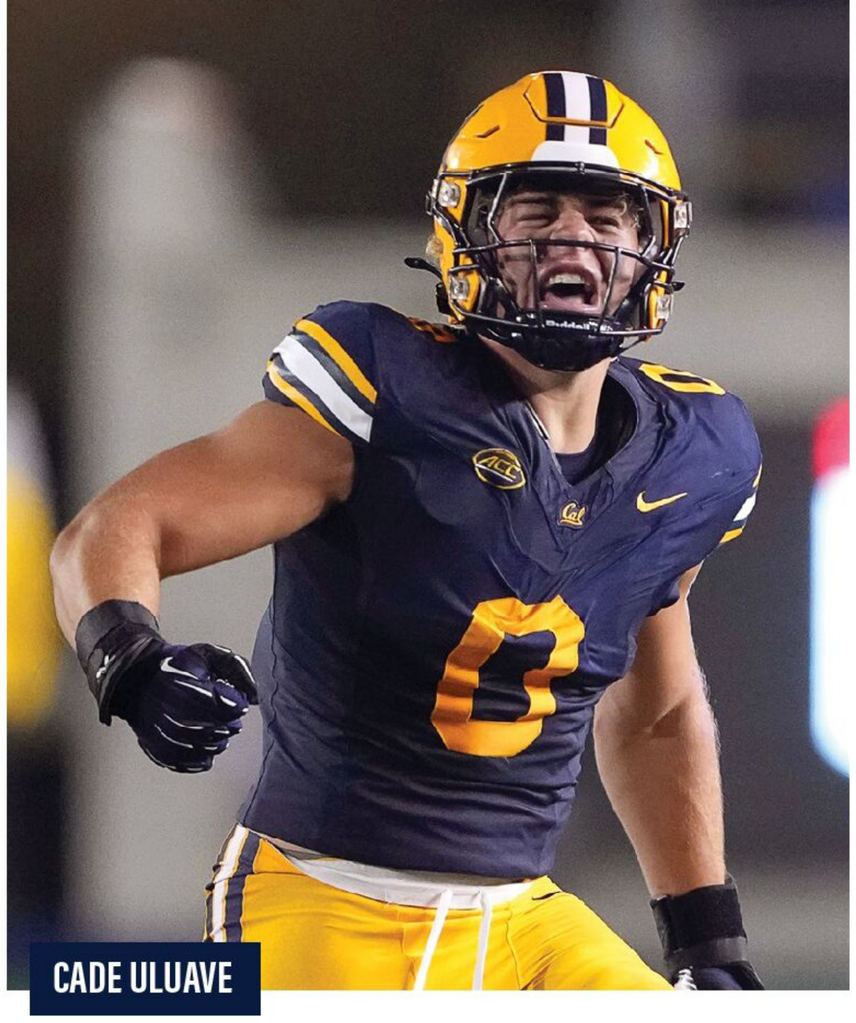
— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	1	Jaeden Skeete (Jr.)	21	VJ Wilkins (Jr.)
WR	4	**REED HARRIS (SO.)**	6	Johnathan Montague Jr. (So.)
WR	11	**LEWIS BOND (SR.)**	14	Nedrick Boldin Jr. (Fr.)
LT	71	**JUDE BOWRY (JR.)**	72	Jack Funke (Jr.)
LG	65	**LOGAN TAYLOR (SR.)**	69	Jadon Lafontant (Fr.)
C	53	Dwayne Allick (Sr.)		Tommy Matheson (Sr.)
RG	58	Eryx Daugherty (So.)	51	Amir Johnson (So.)
RT	79	Kevin Cline (Sr.)	58	Ryan Mickow (So.)
TE	17	**JEREMIAH FRANKLIN (SR.)**	19	Ty Lockwood (So.)
QB	9	Dylan Lonergan (So.)	3	Grayson James (Sr.)
RB	27	Turbo Richard (So.)	5	Jordan McDonald (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	17	Edwin Kolenge (Jr.)	9	Josiah Griffin (So.)
DT	93	Owen Stoudmire (Sr.)	55	Kwan Williams (Sr.)
DT	88	Sedarius McConnell (Sr.)	90	Ty Clemons (Sr.)
OLB	15	**QUINTAYVIOUS HUTCHINS (SR.)**	9	Josiah Griffin (So.)
ILB	1	**DAVEON CROUCH (SR.)**	42	Kemori Dixon (Fr.)
ILB	33	Owen McGowan (Sr.)		Jason Hewlett (So.)
CB	24	**AMARI JACKSON (SR.)**	35	Ashton McShane (So.)
CB	3	**MAX TUCKER (JR.)**	29	Cameron Martinez (Sr.)
SS	27	**KP PRICE (JR.)**	27	Omarion Davis (Fr.)
FS	7	**CARTER DAVIS (SO.)**	0	Omar Thornton (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	99	Luca Lombardo (Sr.)	KR 21	VJ Wilkins (Jr.)
P	25	Andy Quinn (Fr.)	PR 21	VJ Wilkins (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ERIC CANHA-IMAGN IMAGES



CADE ULUAVE

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN BEARS

"This program is in serious trouble. Last year they were really good on defense, and they had good offensive pieces, but they've lost their top linebackers and running backs in the portal. They're a bad fit for the league in every way, and they're trying to break in a new offensive staff with no NIL because the boosters want to put [GM] Ron Rivera in charge of the program instead of the head coach. I'm not sure I've ever seen anything like what's happening here, and this is all before they have to start grinding it out cross country for a few more years. It's a complete mess, and [Justin] Wilcox should just go DC somewhere."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	80	Jordan King (Jr.)	3	Kyion Grayes (Jr.)
WR	7	**TROND GRIZZELL (SR.)**	8	Dazmin James (So.)
WR	22	Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)	19	Trevor Rogers (Fr.)
LT	50	LaJuan Owens (So.)	77	Braden Miller (Jr.)
LG	78	Lamar Robinson (Sr.)	59	Akili Calhoun (Sr.)
C	56	Tyson Ruffins (Jr.)	76	**BASTIAN SWINNEY (JR.)**
RG	66	Jordan Spasojevic-Moko (Sr.)	71	Sioape Vatikani (Jr.)
RT	52	**NICK MORROW (SO.)**	54	Frederick Williams III (So.)
TE	86	Jeffrey Johnson (Sr.)	89	Ben Marshall (So.)
QB	13	Devin Brown (Jr.)	3	Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele (Fr.)
RB	28	Jamaal Wiley (Fr.)		Kendrick Raphael (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	88	T.J. Bollers (Sr.)		Tyson Ford (So.)
DT	47	**AIDAN KEANAAINA (SR.)**	94	Stanley Saole-McKenzie (Sr.)
DT	98	**NATE BURRELL (SR.)**	96	Derek Wilkins (Jr.)
OLB	43	Ryan McCulloch (Jr.)	10	Jayden Wayne (Jr.)
ILB	0	**CADE ULUAVE (JR.)**	46	Aaron Hampton (So.)
ILB	13	Buom Jock (Jr.)	57	BJ Jones (So.)
OLB	19	Odera Okaka (Jr.)	18	Serigne Tounkara (So.)
CB	5	Hezekiah Masses (Sr.)	6	Ja'ir Smith (Sr.)
CB	20	Cam Sidney (Jr.)	8	Jasiah Wagoner (So.)
S	22	Tristan Dunn (Jr.)	23	Isaiah Crosby (Jr.)
S	2	Dru Polidore Jr. (Sr.)	8	Jasiah Wagoner (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	28	Spencer Brien (So.)	KR	22 Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)
P	40	Brook Honoré Jr. (Jr.)	PR	22 Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES

CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 77 | ACC PREDICTION: 15 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE After two years away from the field, Bryan Harsin is back, but as a coordinator. The former Auburn, Boise State and Arkansas State head coach oversees a unit that needs a quarterback after Fernando Mendoza's transfer. Ohio State transfer Devin Brown could be the guy, although decorated incoming freshman Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele is in contention.

Before the spring portal opened, head coach Justin Wilcox gushed about his running back depth, headlined by Jadyn Ott and Jaivian Thomas. But they entered the portal along with three other backs, leaving only Jamaal Wiley, transfers Kendrick Raphael and Brandon High Jr. and freshman Anthony League in the room.

After being one of only two FBS teams to allow 50 sacks in 2024, Cal should have better depth along its line. The Bears brought in players with starting experience in Tyson Ruffins (Nevada), LaJuan Owens (New Mexico), Lamar Robinson (Georgia State) and Jordan Spasojevic-Moko (Charlotte). "There's more competitive depth there," Wilcox says.

Cal brings back wideout Trond Grizzell, and UNLV transfer Jacob De Jesus should also be a factor. Tight end Jack Endries transferred to Texas and is a big loss.

DEFENSE The secondary will be the priority after losing All-American Nohl Williams and other standouts. Cal brought in several transfers, including cornerback Hezekiah Masses (FIU) and safety Tristan Dunn (Washington), who join veterans like Isaiah Crosby and Cam Sidney.

There are more certainties in the front seven, especially linebacker, where junior Cade Uluave will lead the defense after a 71-tackle season. Cal will lean on other veterans like linebacker Ryan McCulloch and defensive linemen T.J. Bollers and Derek Wilkins. But there are plenty of opportunities for younger players or transfers like Odera Okaka, a junior-college standout, to shine.

SPECIALISTS Cal needs to improve its placekicking and may look to the portal for help there. There's a new face at punter with Brook Honoré Jr. The big upgrade could come on returns with De Jesus, who earned All-America honors as a return specialist at UNLV. "We're going to find different ways to get him the ball," Wilcox says.

FINAL ANALYSIS Cal has an opportunity with Ron Rivera joining the program as general manager and an increased appetite to win. Wilcox ultimately must deliver in close games after Cal underachieved in 2024. If the offense can overcome Mendoza's loss, there are enough key returnees for Harsin. The Bears miss Clemson on the schedule and have some key opportunities for home wins against Duke, North Carolina and SMU.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 2-6 ACC)

Aug. 31	UC Davis	W	31-13
Sept. 7	at Auburn	W	21-14
Sept. 14	San Diego State	W	31-10
Sept. 21	at Florida State	L	9-14
Oct. 5	Miami (Fla.)	L	38-39
Oct. 12	at Pitt	L	15-27
Oct. 19	NC State	L	23-24
Oct. 26	Oregon State	W	44-9
Nov. 8	at Wake Forest	W	46-36
Nov. 16	Syracuse	L	25-33
Nov. 23	Stanford	W	24-21
Nov. 30	at SMU	L	6-38
Dec. 18	vs. UNLV #	L	13-24

#LA Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Oregon State
Sept. 6	Texas Southern
Sept. 13	Minnesota
Sept. 20	at San Diego State
Sept. 27	at Boston College
Oct. 4	Duke
Oct. 17	North Carolina
Oct. 24	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 1	Virginia
Nov. 8	at Louisville
Nov. 22	at Stanford
Nov. 29	SMU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaron-Keawe Sagapolutele, QB	★★★★★
2.	Jae'on Young, CB	★★★
3.	Meyer Swinney, TE	★★★
4.	Odera Okaka, EDGE	★★★
5.	Tre' Harrison, S	★★★
6.	Ike Okafor, DL	★★★
7.	Michael Klisiewicz, OT	★★★
8.	Dominic Ingrassia, QB	★★★
9.	Anthony League, RB	★★★
10.	Aiden Manutai, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Justin Wilcox • Record at School: 42-50 (8 years)
Career Record: 42-50 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bryan Harsin
Co-Defensive Coordinators: Vic So'oto and Terrence Brown
Location: Berkeley, Calif. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (63,000)

CLEMSON TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 5 | ACC PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 10-4, 7-1 ACC

OFFENSE After a shaky first season as a starter, Clemson quarterback Cade Klubnik was outstanding as a junior. He had 43 total touchdowns (36 passing, seven rushing) and flashed his 5-star talent time after time as the Tigers ranked in the top 20 nationally in total offense and scoring offense.

Klubnik, one of the nation's top returning quarterbacks, also gets the luxury of throwing to one of the country's best wide receiving corps in 2025. Antonio Williams was a first-team All-ACC pick last year, and Bryant Wesco Jr. and T.J. Moore should only improve as sophomores.

Converted wide receiver Adam Randall, a 6-foot-2, 225-pound bruiser, is the clubhouse leader for the starting running back position, but keep an eye on true freshman Gideon Davidson to emerge quickly out of the backfield, too. Clemson returns four starting offensive linemen.

DEFENSE For years, former defensive coordinator Brent Venables' Clemson defenses shut down the run. His successor, Wes Goodwin, kept that up at first, too. But the bottom fell out in 2024. Goodwin's defense allowed 4.71 yards per carry, its worst mark since 1975.

Head coach Dabo Swinney fired Goodwin after three seasons and made a splashy hire to replace him: Tom Allen, the former Indiana head coach and Penn State defensive coordinator. With 30-plus years of experience, Allen commands a room, and he's as fiery and demonstrative as they come.

Junior linemen Peter Woods and T.J. Parker are NFL talents, and Purdue transfer Will Heldt should start immediately at defensive end. Sophomore linebacker Sammy Brown is a stud, and Avieon Terrell and Ashton Hampton are a solid one-two punch at corner. There are some depth questions, especially at DB, but this group could bounce back quickly.

SPECIALISTS Clemson hit the lottery with kicker Nolan Hauser, who made 18-of-24 field goals as a true freshman, including the longest walk-off field goal in FBS conference championship game history (56 yards). The punter spot is up for grabs with longtime starter Aidan Swanson gone.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last year, Clemson won 10 games, took home the ACC championship and returned to the College Football Playoff after a three-season drought. That's an excellent floor. Hitting their ceiling has been a little tougher for the Tigers, who finished 0-3 against the SEC last year and aren't back into the top tier of the sport just yet.

With eight starters back on both offense and defense, the stars are starting to align. Once again, it's playoff or bust for Swinney's program. Results against LSU and South Carolina could be the difference between a good Clemson season and a great one.

2024 RESULTS (10-4, 7-1 ACC)

Aug. 31	vs. Georgia #	L	3-34
Sept. 7	Appalachian State	W	66-20
Sept. 21	NC State	W	59-35
Sept. 28	Stanford	W	40-14
Oct. 5	at Florida State	W	29-13
Oct. 12	at Wake Forest	W	49-14
Oct. 19	Virginia	W	48-31
Nov. 2	Louisville	L	21-33
Nov. 9	at Virginia Tech	W	24-14
Nov. 16	at Pitt	W	24-20
Nov. 23	The Citadel	W	51-14
Nov. 30	South Carolina	L	14-17
Dec. 7	vs. SMU %	W	34-31
Dec. 21	at Texas &	L	24-38

#Atlanta %Charlotte, N.C. &CFB Playoff First Round

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	LSU
Sept. 6	Troy
Sept. 13	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 20	Syracuse
Oct. 4	at North Carolina
Oct. 11	at Boston College
Oct. 18	SMU
Nov. 1	Duke
Nov. 8	Florida State
Nov. 14	at Louisville
Nov. 22	Furman
Nov. 29	at South Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Amare Adams, DL	★★★★
2.	Gideon Davidson, RB	★★★★
3.	Marquise Henderson, RB	★★★★
4.	Ari Watford, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Jakarrion Kenan, S	★★★★
6.	Chris Denson, QB	★★★★
7.	Brayden Jacobs, OT	★★★
8.	Logan Anderson, LB	★★★
9.	Juju Preston, WR	★★★
10.	Logan Brooking, TE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dabo Swinney • Record at School: 180-47 (16+ years)
Career Record: 180-47 (16+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Garrett Riley
Defensive Coordinator: Tom Allen • Location: Clemson, S.C.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (81,500)

CADE KLUBNIK

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"This is the year we find out if Dabo [Swinney] and his culture can survive in the new era of this game. Two years ago, we put on the tape, and it felt like, wow, their best days are behind them because of the shift in personnel and the stance against NIL. You saw it right away, especially at position groups like receiver where they used to dominate. Now they're getting better; you're seeing more talent than the last couple years. ... How good is Cade [Klubnik], really? His ceiling defines their limit as a program. You should see a big jump as [Garrett] Riley's playbook expands with him. ... Defensively, they've improved by bringing in [Tom] Allen because he knows how to coach high-end talent and be disruptive. ... They're playing the game in NIL now, but they need a big season from the quarterback to be the old Clemson that charges through the league."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	0	**ANTONIO WILLIAMS (JR.)**	6	Tyler Brown (So.)
WR	12	**BRYANT WESCO JR. (SO.)**	80	Tristan Smith (Sr.)
WR	1	**T.J. MOORE (SO.)**	22	Cole Turner (Jr.)
LT	71	**TRISTAN LEIGH (SR.)**	74	Brayden Jacobs (Fr.)
LG	73	Harris Sewell (Jr.)	50	Collin Sadler (Jr.)
C	53	**RYAN LINTHICUM (SR.)**	52	Elyjah Thurmon (So.)
RG	64	**WALKER PARKS (SR.)**	77	Ronan O'Connell (Fr.)
RT	78	**BLAKE MILLER (SR.)**	76	Mason Wade (Fr.)
TE	11	Olsen Patt-Henry (Jr.)	5	Josh Sapp (Jr.)
QB	2	**CADE KLUBNIK (SR.)**	17	Christopher Vizzina (So.)
RB	8	Adam Randall (Sr.)	9	Gideon Davidson (Fr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	3	T.J. Parker (Jr.)	15	Jahiem Lawson (Jr.)
DT	11	**PETER WOODS (JR.)**	95	Amare Adams (Fr.)
DT	19	DeMonte Capehart (Sr.)	90	Stephiylan Green (So.)
DE	13	Will Heldt (Jr.)	44	Cade Denhoff (Sr.)
LB	17	**WADE WOODAZ (SR.)**	22	Dee Crayton (So.)
LB	47	**SAMMY BROWN (SO.)**	21	Kobe McCloud (Jr.)
CB	20	**AVIEON TERRELL (JR.)**	1	Branden Strozier (So.)
CB	23	Ashton Hampton (So.)	10	**JEADYN LUKUS (SR.)**
NB	7	**KHALIL BARNES (JR.)**	2	Shelton Lewis (Jr.)
SS	18	Kylon Griffin (Jr.)	25	Ricardo Jones (So.)
FS	24	Tyler Venables (Sr.)	14	Rob Billings (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	81	Nolan Hauser (So.)	KR	26	Jay Haynes (So.)
P	89	Jack Smith (Jr.)	PR	0	Antonio Williams (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KEN RUINARD-IMAGN IMAGES

WESLEY WILLIAMS

SCOUTING THE BLUE DEVILS

"North Carolina got all the talk, but this is going to be a fascinating program to watch down the road. ... They're all-in on NIL, and [QB Darian] Mensah was a big investment for them. If he's as effective as he was at Tulane, they could be a title contender because that defense is absolutely legit. They're returning almost everyone, and last year was some of Manny Diaz's best work of his career. ... They're recruiting high schools better than anyone's seen from them, too. Combined with their NIL, it's a safe bet they're going to be able to hang on to these guys. ... This is a program that's all-in on football in a way we've never seen."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	18	Cooper Barkate (Sr.)	11	Chase Tyler (Fr.)
WR	7	Que'Sean Brown (So.)	84	Akiva Mosse (Fr.)
WR	1	Andrel Anthony (Sr.)	**2**	**SAHMIR HAGANS (SR.)**
LT	**75**	**BRUNO FINA (SR.)**	66	Caleb Dorris (So.)
LG	**77**	**JUSTIN PICKETT (SR.)**	74	Reagan McCranie (So.)
C	**72**	**MATT CRAYCRAFT (JR.)**	63	Bradley Smith (Fr.)
RG	52	Micah Sahakian (Sr.)	76	Gemyel Allen (Fr.)
RT	**53**	**BRIAN PARKER II (JR.)**	70	Jack Small (Fr.)
TE	**15**	**JAKE TAYLOR (JR.)**	85	Jeremiah Hasley (Jr.)
QB	10	Darian Mensah (Jr.)	3	Henry Belin IV (Jr.)
RB	**9**	**JAQUEZ MOORE (SR.)**	5	Peyton Jones (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	**19**	**VINCENT ANTHONY JR. (SR.)**	10	Tyshon Reed (So.)
DT	**96**	**AARON HALL (SR.)**	51	David Anderson (So.)
DT	4	Josiah Green (Sr.)	95	Preston Watson (So.)
DE	**97**	**WESLEY WILLIAMS (JR.)**	50	Kevin O'Connor (So.)
MLB	**12**	**TRE FREEMAN (SR.)**	42	Kendall Johnson (So.)
LB	36	Nick Morris Jr. (Sr.)	34	Luke Mergott (So.)
CB	**0**	**CHANDLER RIVERS (SR.)**	22	Moussa Kane (So.)
CB	24	Kimari Robinson (So.)	21	Landan Callahan (Fr.)
NB	2	Jaiden Francois (Sr.)	13	Travis Bates (Jr.)
S	**23**	**TERRY MOORE (SR.)**	6	Leon Griffin III (So.)
S	20	DaShawn Stone (So.)	15	Placide Djungu-Sungu (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Todd Pelino (Sr.)	KR	5 Peyton Jones (Jr.)
P	56	Kade Reynoldson (So.)	PR	14 Que'Sean Brown (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JAYLYNN NASH-IMAGN IMAGES

DUKE BLUE DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 41 | ACC PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE Duke took a big swing in the offseason, believing Tulane transfer Darian Mensah to be an upgrade over Maalik Murphy at quarterback. That move, combined with four returning starters on the offensive line and running back Jaquez Moore's return to health, sets the Blue Devils up to have a more explosive offense this season after they averaged 26.3 points per game in 2024.

Mensah's ability to make plays in both the running and passing game will certainly help. But who will make plays at wide receiver? Oklahoma transfer Andrel Anthony could be that guy. Que'Sean Brown and Sahmir Hagans return but must prove to be dependable as they assume larger roles in the offense.

DEFENSE True to head coach Manny Diaz's reputation, the Blue Devils proved to be an attacking defense in his first season coaching the unit last season, and there's no indication that will change in 2025. After tying SMU for the ACC lead in sacks (43) and leading the league outright with 116 tackles for a loss, Duke should be solid again thanks to a strong front line, with Vincent Anthony Jr. and Wesley Williams returning along with middle linebacker Tre Freeman. Look for FCS Dartmouth transfer Josiah Green to have an impact at defensive tackle.

The secondary has a superior lockdown corner in Chandler Rivers and ball-hawking safety in Terry Moore. Utah State transfer nickelback Jaiden Francois can make plays against both the run and pass.

SPECIALISTS Now a senior, former walk-on placekicker Todd Pelino is adequate, although five missed field goals and two missed extra points last season give one pause. Kade Reynoldson was a top-five punter in the ACC as a freshman last season and should remain there. He's a weapon. Peyton Jones and Brown have explosiveness in the return game. There's plenty to like for Duke here.

FINAL ANALYSIS Duke exceeded expectations with a nine-win regular season in Diaz's first year as head coach. But the Blue Devils' only victory over a team that finished with a winning record came against UConn. Naturally, Diaz and his staff sought to improve the roster further and were successful, particularly at quarterback with Mensah.

The schedule, with Illinois and Tulane in non-conference games plus road games at Syracuse and Clemson, will be more challenging. Duke looks like a more talented team but one that could win fewer games than a year ago — maybe just dropping to eight regular-season wins. Either way, the Duke program remains on a good foundation as a perennial bowl team just outside of the ACC's elite.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 ACC)

Aug. 30	Elon	W	23-0
Sept. 6	at Northwestern (ot)	W	26-20
Sept. 14	UConn	W	26-21
Sept. 21	at Middle Tennessee	W	45-17
Sept. 28	North Carolina	W	21-20
Oct. 5	at Georgia Tech	L	14-24
Oct. 18	Florida State	W	23-16
Oct. 26	SMU (ot)	L	27-28
Nov. 2	at Miami (Fla.)	L	31-53
Nov. 9	at NC State	W	29-19
Nov. 23	Virginia Tech	W	31-28
Nov. 30	at Wake Forest	W	23-17
Jan. 2	vs. Ole Miss #	L	20-52

#Gator Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Elon
Sept. 6	Illinois
Sept. 13	at Tulane
Sept. 20	NC State
Sept. 27	at Syracuse
Oct. 4	at Cal
Oct. 18	Georgia Tech
Nov. 1	at Clemson
Nov. 8	at UConn
Nov. 15	Virginia
Nov. 22	at North Carolina
Nov. 29	Wake Forest

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bryce Davis, DL	★★★★
2.	Jaivon Solomon, WR	★★★★
3.	Bradley Gompers, LB	★★★★
4.	Bariate Kara, DL	★★★★
5.	Nate Sheppard, RB	★★★★
6.	Dan Mahan, QB	★★★
7.	Jamien Little, WR	★★★
8.	Elliott Schaper, LB	★★★
9.	Tommy Rupley, EDGE	★★★
10.	Kolbe Harmon, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Manny Diaz • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 30-19 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jonathan Brewer
Defensive Coordinator: Jonathan Patke • Location: Durham, N.C.
Stadium: Wallace Wade Stadium (35,018)

FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 45 | ACC PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 ACC

OFFENSE It can't get any worse. After fielding arguably the least productive offense in the country last season, Florida State revamped its coaching staff and roster. The Seminoles tabbed Boston College transfer quarterback Tommy Castellanos to lead the turnaround. The fit could work out considering his previous experience playing under FSU offensive coordinator Gus Malzahn when both were at UCF.

A pair of transfers — wide receivers Duce Robinson (USC) and Squirrel White (Tennessee) — join true freshman running back Ousmane Kromah in adding new weapons who should provide a big spark.

An improved offensive line will be paramount, and Florida State brought in four experienced transfers to rebuild the room under new offensive line coach Herb Hand. Micah Pettus and Gunnar Hansen will man the tackle spots, while Luke Petitbon locks down the middle at center.

DEFENSE The Seminoles will look a lot different on defense, bringing in coordinator Tony White from Nebraska to install a 3-3-5 multiple scheme. The unit was in need of a change, and it got one in a big way, as Florida State should be more aggressive and more creative.

The linebackers are one of the deeper position groups on the roster. In particular, junior Omar Graham Jr. turned heads in the spring.

In the trenches, Darrell Jackson Jr. and James Williams will lead the charge. Safety Edwin Joseph could be a breakout star, and the Noles added Power 4 transfer Jeremiah Wilson (Houston) at corner.

SPECIALISTS Florida State will have to replace its All-America kicking duo going into 2025, but placekicker Jake Weinberg and punter Mac Chiumento have both been with the program for more than a year and seem up to the challenge. There are a variety of options in the return game. Samuel Singleton Jr. showed off his speed last season, and Squirrel White had experience fielding punts during his time at Tennessee.

FINAL ANALYSIS Following one of the most disappointing campaigns in program history, Florida State and head coach Mike Norvell have made a ton of changes. There's optimism that the Seminoles can get back on the right track, but how high can the program truly climb coming off a 2-10 season? It won't be easy, with Alabama traveling to Doak Campbell Stadium in Week 1. Plus, Florida State ends the year with three of its final four games on the road, including trips to Clemson and Florida. The Seminoles do get the benefit of playing Miami (Fla.) in Tallahassee, but November is an absolute gauntlet for the program.

Norvell needs to have his program back in contention for a bowl game or risk being on the hot seat in the near future.

2024 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 ACC)

Aug. 24	vs. Georgia Tech #	L	21-24
Sept. 2	Boston College	L	13-28
Sept. 14	Memphis	L	12-20
Sept. 21	Cal	W	14-9
Sept. 28	at SMU	L	16-42
Oct. 5	Clemson	L	13-29
Oct. 18	at Duke	L	16-23
Oct. 26	at Miami (Fla.)	L	14-36
Nov. 2	North Carolina	L	11-35
Nov. 9	at Notre Dame	L	3-52
Nov. 23	Charleston Southern	W	41-7
Nov. 30	Florida	L	11-31

#Dublin, Ireland

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Alabama
Sept. 6	East Texas A&M
Sept. 20	Kent State
Sept. 26	at Virginia
Oct. 4	Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 11	Pitt
Oct. 18	at Stanford
Nov. 1	Wake Forest
Nov. 8	at Clemson
Nov. 15	Virginia Tech
Nov. 21	at NC State
Nov. 29	at Florida

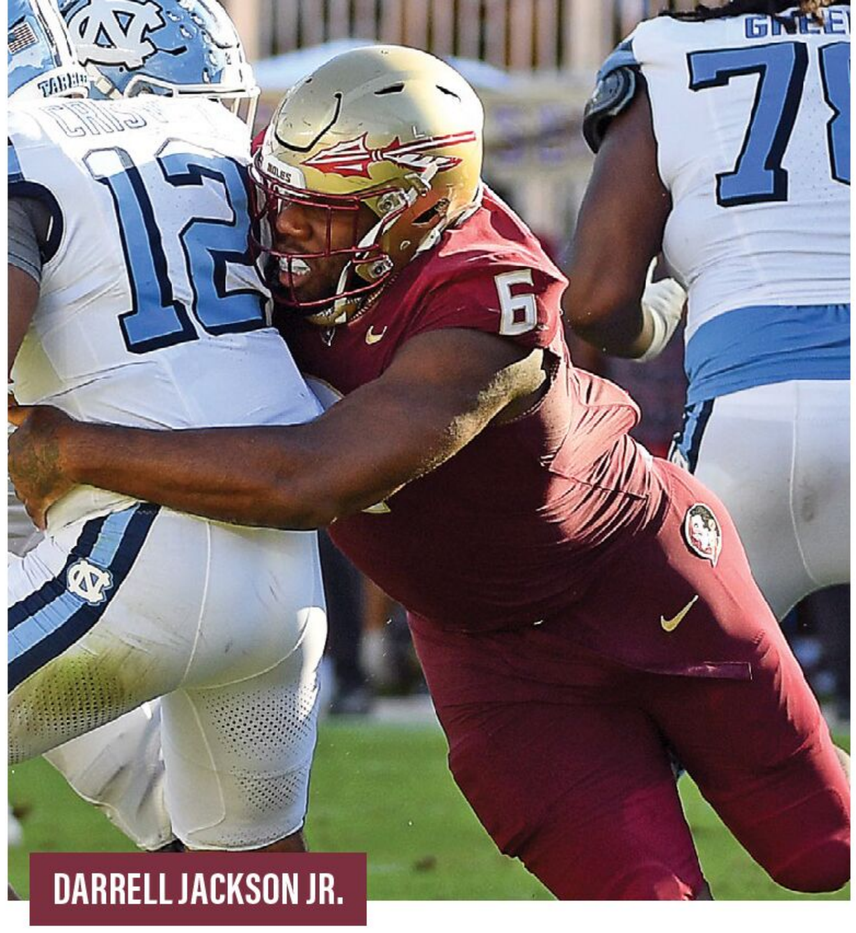
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tylon Lee, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Ousmane Kromah, RB	★★★★
3.	Kevin Wynn, DL	★★★★
4.	Jayvan Boggs, WR	★★★★
5.	Tae'Shaun Gelsey, TE	★★★★
6.	Darryll Desir, EDGE	★★★★
7.	L A Jesse Harrold, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Mario Nash Jr., OT	★★★
9.	Tyeland Coleman, DL	★★★
10.	Chase Loftin, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Norvell • Record at School: 33-27 (5 years)
Career Record: 71-42 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Gus Malzahn
Defensive Coordinator: Tony White • Location: Tallahassee, Fla.
Stadium: Doak Campbell Stadium (70,000)



DARRELL JACKSON JR.

SCOUTING THE SEMINOLES

"There's a significant disconnect in the talent at this program. On paper, in the rankings, they're doing great. But a lot of their rivals feel like they're not recruiting at a truly elite level, and the guys they get aren't developing. ... It fell apart faster than I've ever seen. They were really early adopters to the portal, and that '23 team was an absolute nightmare to scheme against. You had the combination of in-house, development guys from Florida high schools and transfers. They started missing in both categories after that. ... Gus [Malzahn] is going to take it back to basics and do a lot of run-game at first. His hire was way more about culture and having the veteran in the room than it was about a particular kind of scheme."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	0	Duce Robinson (Jr.)	15	Jayvan Boggs (Fr.)
WR	4	Squirrel White (Sr.)	10	B.J. Gibson (So.)
WR	7	Lawayne McCoy (So.)	81	Elijah Moore (Fr.)
LT	55	Gunnar Hansen (Sr.)	79	Lucas Simmons (So.)
LG	76	Adrian Medley (Sr.)	77	Bryson Estes (Sr.)
C	51	Luke Petitbon (Sr.)	65	André Otto (So.)
RG	67	Richie Leonard IV (Sr.)	64	Jacob Rizy (Sr.)
RT	57	Micah Pettus (Sr.)	74	Jonathan Daniels (Fr.)
TE	**18**	**LANDEN THOMAS (SO.)**	13	Randy Pittman Jr. (Jr.)
QB	1	Tommy Castellanos (Sr.)	11	Brock Glenn (So.)
RB	5	Roydell Williams (Sr.)		Ousmane Kromah (Fr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	10	James Williams (Jr.)	13	Deamontae Diggs (Sr.)
NT	**6**	**DARRELL JACKSON JR. (SR.)**	56	KJ Sampson (So.)
DT	95	Daniel Lyons (Jr.)	97	Jayson Jenkins (Jr.)
LB	**9**	**OMAR GRAHAM JR. (JR.)**	29	Caleb LaVallee (So.)
MLB	31	Elijah Herring (Sr.)	28	Justin Cryer (Jr.)
LB	7	Stefon Thompson (Sr.)	**20**	**BLAKE NICHELSON (JR.)**
CB		Jeremiah Wilson (Sr.)	16	Quindarrius Jones (Jr.)
CB	11	Ja'Bril Rawls (So.)	4	Charles Lester III (Fr.)
ROV	0	Earl Little Jr. (Jr.)	12	Conrad Hussey (Jr.)
S	3	Edwin Joseph (So.)	**24**	**K.J. KIRKLAND (SO.)**
S	**1**	**SHYHEIM BROWN (SR.)**	27	Ashlynd Barker (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	22	Jake Weinberg (Fr.)	KR	28	Samuel Singleton Jr. (So.)
P	43	Mac Chiumento (Jr.)	PR	4	Squirrel White (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ROBERT MYERS-IMAGN IMAGES

HAYNES KING

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE YELLOW JACKETS

"Brent [Key] has rebuilt this program in his identity. This is an O-lineman's culture, and they really embrace contact and physicality. ... They're deep at quarterback and running back, and if they can hang on to all those guys, the offense is in really good shape other than being thin on the outside. ... They've got two really bright, really promising coordinators who will be head coaches one day. [Buster] Faulkner really worked some magic with [Haynes] King, and later in the season they really figured it out in the run game. ... [Blake] Gideon is a really big hire for them. They're decent, probably best on the defensive line, so how they adjust to a new system will be the thing to watch. ... This is Key's team now, and they're hard-nosed and mean."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	8	**MALIK RUTHERFORD (SR.)**	3	Eric Rivers (Sr.)
WR	4	Isiah Canion (So.)	11	Dean Patterson (Sr.)
WR	7	Bailey Stockton (So.)	9	Zion Taylor (So.)
LT	78	Ethan Mackenny (Jr.)	69	Josh Petty (Fr.)
LG	67	**JOE FUSILE (SR.)**	51	Kevin Peay Jr. (Fr.)
C	52	Harrison Moore (So.)	50	Tana Alo-Tupuola (So.)
RG	77	**KEYLAN RUTLEDGE (SR.)**	74	Benjamin Galloway (So.)
RT		Malachi Carney (Sr.)	70	Jameson Riggs (Fr.)
TE	80	Brett Seither (Sr.)	17	Josh Beetham (Sr.)
QB	10	**HAYNES KING (SR.)**	12	Aaron Philo (Fr.)
RB	1	**JAMAL HAYNES (SR.)**	28	Trelain Maddox (Fr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	11	Brayden Manley (Jr.)	8	Jordan Boyd (So.)
DT		Akelo Stone (Sr.)	95	Jason Moore (Sr.)
DT	99	**JORDAN VAN DEN BERG (SR.)**	55	Christian Garrett (Fr.)
DE	24	Ronald Triplette (Sr.)	98	Amontrae Bradford (So.)
LB	44	**KYLE EFFORD (JR.)**	15	Tah'j Butler (So.)
LB	2	E.J. Lightsey (Jr.)	17	Jackson Hamilton (Sr.)
CB	16	Kelvin Hill (So.)	4	Daiquan White (Jr.)
CB	3	**AHMARI HARVEY (SR.)**	23	Zachary Tobe (Jr.)
NB	6	Rodney Shelley (Sr.)		Jyron Gilmore (Sr.)
S	9	Omar Daniels (Sr.)	20	Christian Pritchett (So.)
S	5	**CLAYTON POWELL-LEE (SR.)**	27	Tae Harris (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Aidan Birr (Jr.)	KR	7 Bailey Stockton (So.)
P	47	Marshall Nichols (Sr.)	PR	6 Rodney Shelley (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 35 | ACC PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE It's realistic to believe that there will be no drop-off in 2025 from Georgia Tech's solid offensive production over the past two seasons.

Tech returns quarterback Haynes King (and his backup, Aaron Philo), top rusher Jamal Haynes and wide receiver Malik Rutherford to lead a unit that ranked sixth in the ACC in total offense (424.5 ypg) and ranked second in the conference in rushing (187.0 ypg). Tech also retained offensive coordinator Buster Faulkner, quarterbacks coach Chris Weinke, running backs coach/run game coordinator Norval McKenzie, offensive line coach Geep Wade and wide receivers coach Trent McKnight.

If there is concern, it lies on the offensive front. Left tackle Corey Robinson transferred, and center Weston Franklin and right tackle Jordan Williams graduated. Guards Keylan Rutledge and Joe Fusile are back, and Tech added transfer Malachi Carney (South Alabama) to play right tackle. Coaches hope that left tackle Ethan Mackenny returns to his Freshman All-America (2023) form after being injured for most of last season.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Tyler Santucci left Tech in the winter to coach the Baltimore Ravens linebackers, so head coach Brent Key recruited Texas safeties coach Blake Gideon to be the Yellow Jackets' new coordinator. Gideon was a star safety at Texas as a player and then rose through the coaching ranks before returning to his alma mater to help make the Longhorns a national title contender. He inherits a defense that made tremendous strides under Santucci and returns plenty of key pieces.

Tech has a solid, deep rotation at linebacker led by Kyle Efford and E.J. Lightsey. A versatile secondary, highlighted by safety Clayton Powell-Lee, should give Gideon plenty of pieces to mix and match in a 4-2-5 scheme.

Tech's defensive front returns tackle Jordan van den Berg and adds Ole Miss transfer and former Jacket Akelo Sone, but Tech needs to find consistency on the edges with a better pass rush.

SPECIALISTS Tech went into the transfer portal to pick up punter Marshall Nichols, who began his career at Mississippi State before spending three seasons at UNLV. Nichols was honorable mention All-Mountain West and a Ray Guy Award nominee with the Rebels. Kicker Aidan Birr is 32-of-41 on field goals for his career and 82-of-83 on extra points.

FINAL ANALYSIS The expectation for Tech is to make a jump into ACC title contention in 2025. With so many key pieces returning on both sides of the ball, the retention of the majority of the program's key assistants and one of the best recruiting classes in program history, the Jackets won't have many excuses (barring injuries) for not increasing their win total.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 ACC)

Aug. 24	vs. Florida State #	W	24-21
Aug. 31	Georgia State	W	35-12
Sept. 7	at Syracuse	L	28-31
Sept. 14	VMI	W	59-7
Sept. 21	at Louisville	L	19-31
Oct. 5	Duke	W	24-14
Oct. 12	at North Carolina	W	41-34
Oct. 19	Notre Dame	L	13-31
Oct. 26	at Virginia Tech	L	6-21
Nov. 9	Miami (Fla.)	W	28-23
Nov. 21	NC State	W	30-29
Nov. 29	at Georgia (ot)	L	42-44
Dec. 27	vs. Vanderbilt %	L	27-35

#Dublin, Ireland %Birmingham Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Colorado
Sept. 6	Gardner-Webb
Sept. 13	Clemson
Sept. 20	Temple
Sept. 27	at Wake Forest
Oct. 11	Virginia Tech
Oct. 18	at Duke
Oct. 25	Syracuse
Nov. 1	at NC State
Nov. 15	at Boston College
Nov. 22	Pitt
Nov. 28	Georgia #

#Mercedes-Benz Stadium

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Tae Harris, S	★★★★
2. Josh Petty, IOL	★★★★
3. Christian Garrett, DL	★★★★
4. Dalen Penson, CB	★★★★
5. J.P. Powell, RB	★★★★
6. Peyton Joseph, IOL	★★★★
7. Fenix Felton, S	★★★★
8. Derry Norris Jr., DL	★★★
9. Carrington Coombs, EDGE	★★★
10. Shane Marshall, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Key • Record at School: 18-16 (3 years)
Career Record: 18-16 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Buster Faulkner
Defensive Coordinator: Blake Gideon • Location: Atlanta, Ga.
Stadium: Bobby Dodd Stadium (51,913)

LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 26 | ACC PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE Head coach Jeff Brohm will reboot his offense with transfer quarterback Miller Moss, who had a record-setting Holiday Bowl performance vs. Louisville for USC in 2023 before starting most of last season for the Trojans. Moss had 200 or more passing yards in all nine games he played last fall and completed at least two-thirds of his pass attempts in five. "Battle-tested," Brohm says of Moss. "He's had some ups and downs, but he throws the ball accurately, and he understands football."

Moss will share the backfield with dynamic young running backs Isaac Brown and Duke Watson, who combined for 1,770 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns as freshmen. He also will target veteran wide receivers Chris Bell and Caullin Lacy, who was limited by injury and ultimately redshirted last fall. Akron transfer Bobby Golden also should be involved. The tight end spot resets, but there are opportunities for players like Nate Kurisky. "I think we know who our playmakers are," Brohm says.

Up front, transfers like Makylan Pounders (Mississippi State) and Jordan Church (Florida Atlantic) join returning center Pete Nygra and other holdovers, like Trevonte Sylvester and Rasheed Miller.

DEFENSE Improved pass defense is the priority after Louisville slipped to 100th nationally in passing yards allowed per game and 87th in pass efficiency defense last season. Brohm will lean on a revamped secondary that loses star cornerback Quincy Riley but adds transfers like safety JoJo Evans (FIU) and cornerbacks Rodney Johnson Jr. (FCS Southern), Jabari Mack (Jacksonville State) and Justin Agu (Louisiana). Louisville also hit the portal for defensive linemen after losing top pass-rusher Ashton Gillotte. Defensive end transfers Wesley Bailey (Rutgers) and Clev Lubin (Coastal Carolina) join holdover tackles Jordan Guerad and Rene Konga.

Linebacker is one of few positions that doesn't change much from 2024, as top tacklers TJ Quinn and Stanquan Clark are back, alongside Antonio Watts and others. Transfer Kalib Perry (Tennessee) adds depth to the group.

SPECIALISTS The Cardinals will have new primary specialists in Nick Keller (placekicking) and Carter Schwartz (punting). Returns should be a strength with Lacy and Brown both contributing.

FINAL ANALYSIS After playing for an ACC title in Brohm's first season and then backsliding a bit last fall, Louisville could be posed for a push yet again. Brohm will rely on another heavy portal haul but also brings back key players at wide receiver, running back, center and linebacker. The league is wide open after Clemson, but if Moss clicks and the defense improves against the pass, Louisville could be the Tigers' top challenger.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 ACC)

Aug. 31	Austin Peay	W	62-0
Sept. 7	Jacksonville State	W	49-14
Sept. 21	Georgia Tech	W	31-19
Sept. 28	at Notre Dame	L	24-31
Oct. 5	SMU	L	27-34
Oct. 12	at Virginia	W	24-20
Oct. 19	Miami (Fla.)	L	45-52
Oct. 25	at Boston College	W	31-27
Nov. 2	at Clemson	W	33-21
Nov. 16	at Stanford	L	35-38
Nov. 23	Pitt	W	37-9
Nov. 30	at Kentucky	W	41-14
Dec. 31	vs. Washington #	W	35-34

#Sun Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Eastern Kentucky
Sept. 6	James Madison
Sept. 20	Bowling Green
Sept. 27	at Pitt
Oct. 4	Virginia
Oct. 17	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 25	Boston College
Nov. 1	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 8	Cal
Nov. 14	Clemson
Nov. 22	at SMU
Nov. 29	Kentucky

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Grant Houser, TE	★★★★
2.	CJ May, EDGE	★★★
3.	Micah Rice, S	★★★
4.	Kamare Williams, WR	★★★
5.	Bailey Abercrombie, DL	★★★
6.	Mason Mims, QB	★★★
7.	Cameron White, LB	★★★
8.	Cameron Gorin, IOL	★★★
9.	Jamarice Wilder, RB	★★★
10.	Gradey Anthony, OT	***

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Brohm • Record at School: 19-8 (2 years)
Career Record: 85-52 (11 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brian Brohm
Defensive Coordinators: Mark Hagen, Ron English • Location: Louisville, Ky.
Stadium: L&N Federal Credit Union Stadium (60,800)

ISAAC BROWN

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"Even losing the quarterback-wide receiver combo, this is going to be a fantastic offense. Miller Moss is going to do really well with [Jeff] Brohm. That was a huge, huge get for them in the portal. ... Even losing [Ja'Corey] Brooks, they're going to be really strong at wide receiver with the transfers they've brought in and returning [Caullin] Lacy. ... The area of the most concern is probably the secondary, and they lost [Ashton] Gillotte on their defensive line, too. How they handle restocking the defense will determine how far they can go. This is a team that should be considered a title dark horse because of how effective the offense can be in big games. Moss is a veteran who's played well in a variety of systems. They're going to score a lot of points."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	**0**	**CHRIS BELL (SR.)**	82	Terrance McWilliams (So.)
WR	86	Antonio Meeks (Sr.)	81	Bobby Golden (Fr.)
WR	5	Caullin Lacy (Sr.)	84	Kris Hughes (So.)
LT	66	Makylan Pounders (Sr.)	**70**	**TREVONTE SYLVESTER (SR.)**
LG	74	Jordan Church (So.)	71	Mahamane Moussa (Sr.)
C	**50**	**PETE NYGRA (SR.)**	64	Michael Flores (Sr.)
RG	57	Naeer Jackson (Jr.)	56	Carter Guillaume (So.)
RT	60	Rasheed Miller (Sr.)	53	Lance Robinson (Sr.)
TE	85	Nate Kurisky (Jr.)	88	Jaleel Skinner (Jr.)
QB	7	Miller Moss (Sr.)	13	Deuce Adams (Fr.)
RB	**1**	**ISAAC BROWN (SO.)**	26	Duke Watson (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

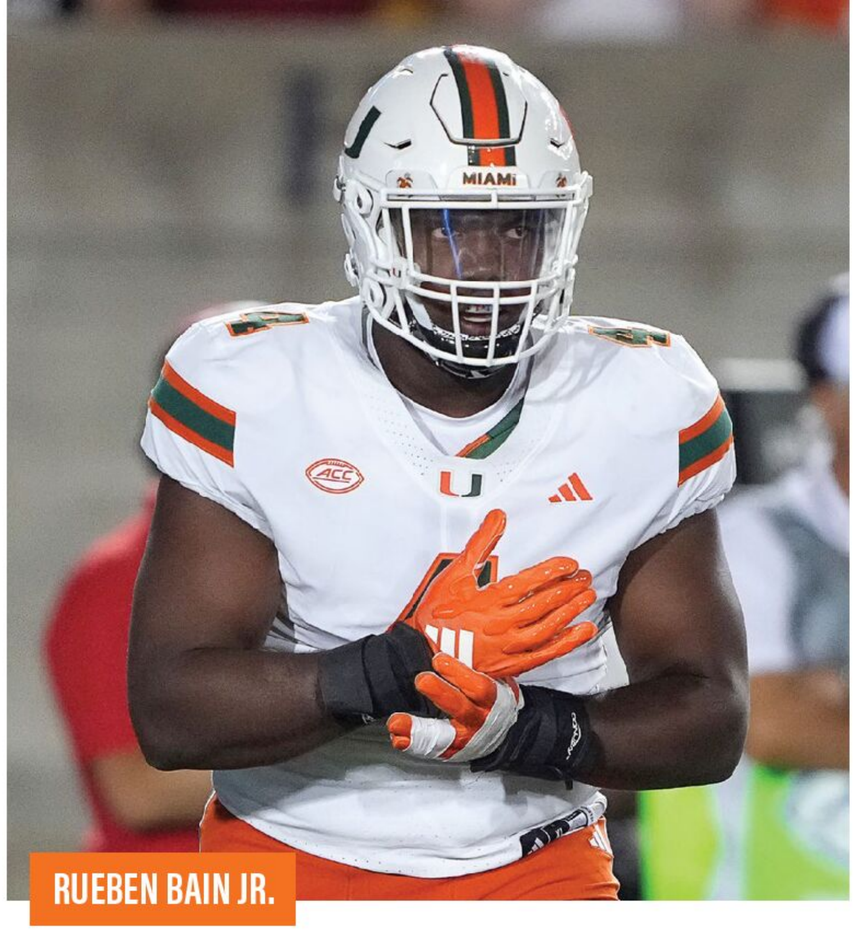
DE	23	Wesley Bailey (Sr.)	97	Maurice Davis (Fr.)
DT	**99**	**JORDAN GUERAD (SR.)**	95	Jerry Lawson (Jr.)
DT	90	Rene Konga (Sr.)	45	Denzel Lowry (Sr.)
DE	50	Clev Lubin (Jr.)	98	Adonijah Green (So.)
LB	**6**	**STANQUAN CLARK (JR.)**	12	Kalib Perry (Sr.)
LB	**34**	**TJ QUINN (SR.)**	11	T.J. Capers (So.)
LB	**9**	**ANTONIO WATTS (JR.)**	43	Trent Carter (Fr.)
CB	4	Jabari Mack (Sr.)	13	Justin Agu (Jr.)
CB	7	Rodney Johnson Jr. (Sr.)	30	Rae'mon Mosby (Fr.)
S	27	JoJo Evans (Sr.)	28	Daeh McCullough (So.)
S	21	D'Angelo Hutchinson (Sr.)	24	Corey Gordon (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Nick Keller (Jr.)	**KR**	1	Isaac Brown (So.)
P	39	Carter Schwartz (So.)	**PR**	5	Caullin Lacy (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JORDAN PRATHER-IMAGN IMAGES



RUEBEN BAIN JR.

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE HURRICANES

"Is [Carson] Beck worth all that money? No one really knows right now, but that's the question you have to ask. They'll be decent up front on defense, and they spent like crazy for a new secondary. They're good on the offensive line; that's one area you don't worry about with Mario [Cristobal]. ... I think there's a bigger question here on how and why they spend what they do on the guys they pick. It's sort of like a Dodgers or Yankees mindset, spending on top-end recruits and portal guys, and not really a team-focused culture. You're still in Florida, you still have to prioritize the high schools, and they've done that in NIL. ... The new DC [Corey Hetherman] did a really good job at Minnesota, and he'll have more talent to play with than Lance [Guidry] did.

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	7	CJ Daniels (Sr.)	19	Ny Carr (So.)
WR	0	Joshisa Trader (So.)	18	Chance Robinson (So.)
WR		Keelan Marion (Sr.)	12	Malachi Toney (Fr.)
LT	70	Markel Bell (Sr.)	62	Tommy Kinsler IV (So.)
LG	76	Ryan Rodriguez (Sr.)	**78**	**MATTHEW MCCOY (JR.)**
C	52	James Brockermeyer (Sr.)	65	Seuseu Alofaituli (Fr.)
RG	**73**	**ANEZ COOPER (SR.)**	55	Nino Francavilla (So.)
RT	**61**	**FRANCIS MAUIGOA (JR.)**	63	Samson Okunlola (So.)
TE	9	Elija Lofton (So.)	87	Alex Bauman (Sr.)
QB	11	Carson Beck (Sr.)	17	Emory Williams (So.)
RB	4	Mark Fletcher Jr. (Jr.)	2	Jordan Lyle (So.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	**4**	**RUEBEN BAIN JR. (JR.)**	9	Malik Bryant (Jr.)
DT	11	David Blay Jr. (Sr.)	34	Adarius Hayes (So.)
DT	5	Justin Scott (So.)	99	Ahmad Moten Sr. (Jr.)
DE	**3**	**AKHEEM MESIDOR (SR.)**	18	Armondo Blount (So.)
OLB	**31**	**WESLEY BISSAINTHE (SR.)**	22	Cam Pruitt (Fr.)
ILB	10	Raul Aguirre Jr. (Jr.)	21	Jaylin Alderman (Sr.)
CB	**29**	**OJ FREDERIQUE JR. (SO.)**	24	Ethan O'Connor (So.)
CB	6	Xavier Lucas (So.)	19	Charles Brantley (Sr.)
NB	2	Damari Brown (So.)	25	Jadais Richard (Sr.)
S	23	Dylan Day (So.)		Bryce Fitzgerald (Fr.)
S	7	Zechariah Poyser (So.)	15	Markeith Williams (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Bert Auburn (Sr.)	KR	Keelan Marion (Sr.)
P	94	Dylan Joyce (Jr.)	PR	5 Ray Ray Joseph (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MIAMI HURRICANES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 10 | ACC PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE The nation's No. 1 offense in 2024 is getting a makeover. There's a new guy behind center in Georgia transfer Carson Beck, and the Hurricanes are also replacing their top five receivers and a starting running back. Three key starters are back on the offensive line, and two productive running backs do return. The receiving corps is a question mark; the best playmaker in that unit might be sophomore Joshisa Trader, although BYU transfer Keelan Marion should make an impact.

The expectation is that offensive coordinator Shannon Dawson's attack will be more run-heavy, but to achieve the hoped-for balance, Beck will need to play like he did two years ago rather than the guy who threw an SEC-high 12 interceptions last year. It will be difficult to approach last year's average of 43.9 points per game, but Miami expects to field an efficient offense that can make plays via the run and the pass.

DEFENSE Miami allowed 30 or more points in five of eight ACC games last season and was tied for No. 68 in the nation in allowing 25.3 points per game. So something had to give, and it did. The unit has a new coordinator in Corey Hetherman, whose attacking 4-2-5 defense helped Minnesota field the nation's No. 5-ranked total defense a year ago. The position coaches are all new faces aside from DL coach Jason Taylor.

The team also revamped its personnel. The only returning starters are ends Rueben Bain Jr. and Akheem Mesidor, outside linebacker Wesley Bissainthe and cornerback OJ Frederique Jr.

Head coach Mario Cristobal picked up tackle David Blay Jr. and five defensive backs in the first portal window, and with young talent from three top-ranked recruiting classes also appearing ready to step up, this should be a much better unit in 2025.

SPECIALISTS Miami added transfer placekicker Bert Auburn (Texas), who was 16-of-25 on field goals last season for the Longhorns, including 10-of-11 from inside 40. The team also returns one of the ACC's top punters in Dylan Joyce, and the Canes added explosiveness to the return game with Marion, one of the top kickoff returners in college football.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Canes may not need to match last year's astronomical offensive production if the defense can step up. The formula for success might be a run-heavy offense featuring a veteran line and talented backs, with Beck in more of a game-manager role. On defense, if the back end can hold up, then guys like Bain and Mesidor can be set loose to wreak havoc. Miami fans are expecting a playoff appearance, so the pressure is on, whether it is warranted or not. Games with Notre Dame and Florida in the first few weeks of the season will set the tone.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 31	at Florida	W	41-17
Sept. 7	Florida A&M	W	56-9
Sept. 14	Ball State	W	62-0
Sept. 21	at South Florida	W	50-15
Sept. 27	Virginia Tech	W	38-34
Oct. 5	at Cal	W	39-38
Oct. 19	at Louisville	W	52-45
Oct. 26	Florida State	W	36-14
Nov. 2	Duke	W	53-31
Nov. 9	at Georgia Tech	L	23-28
Nov. 23	Wake Forest	W	42-14
Nov. 30	at Syracuse	L	38-42
Dec. 28	vs. Iowa State #	L	41-42

#Pop-Tarts Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Notre Dame
Sept. 6	Bethune-Cookman
Sept. 13	South Florida
Sept. 20	Florida
Oct. 4	at Florida State
Oct. 17	Louisville
Oct. 25	Stanford
Nov. 1	at SMU
Nov. 8	Syracuse
Nov. 15	NC State
Nov. 22	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 29	at Pitt

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Hayden Lowe, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Joshua Moore, WR	★★★★
3.	Kellen Wiley Jr., LB	★★★★
4.	Luke Nickel, QB	★★★★
5.	Bryce Fitzgerald, S	★★★★
6.	Girard Pringle Jr., RB	★★★★
7.	Herbert Scroggins III, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Seuseu Alofaituli, IOL	★★★★
9.	Brock Schott, TE	★★★★
10.	Chris Ewald Jr., CB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mario Cristobal • Record at School: 22-16 (3 years)
Career Record: 84-76 (13+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Shannon Dawson
Defensive Coordinator: Corey Hetherman • Location: Coral Gables, Fla.
Stadium: Hard Rock Stadium (64,767)

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 52 | ACC PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE North Carolina's offense will feature a heavy reliance on unproven young talent and a patchwork of transfer additions, the most promising of whom is Gio Lopez. The former South Alabama quarterback threw for 2,559 yards and rushed for 465 more in 2024. At receiver, Jordan Shipp and Kobe Paysour headline the outside, while Aziah Johnson, a dynamic Michigan State transfer, mans the slot. Tight end Jake Johnson adds a big target in the middle of the field.

The offensive line has received a bit of a makeover, as the Tar Heels picked up Will O'Steen, William Boone, Jordan Hall, Daniel King and Christo Kelly in the transfer portal. The offense has potential on paper, but between inexperience, roster turnover and a lack of proven production, significant growing pains seem likely early in the season.

DEFENSE UNC's defense will lean heavily on newcomers, and Pryce Yates, in particular, provides a potential difference-maker up front. The UConn transfer has 12.5 career sacks and earned defensive MVP honors against the Tar Heels in last year's Fenway Bowl. He headlines a rebuilt front four that includes Smith Vilbert and CJ Mims. Sophomore D'antre Robinson, a Florida transfer, is expected to start on the interior line, with former Arizona Wildcat Isaiah Johnson providing depth.

The linebacker situation is murkier, though, after standouts Amare Campbell and Beau Atkinson entered the transfer portal. Khmori House, an incredibly athletic transfer from Washington, is likely to start, with transfer Mikai Gbayor and freshman Evan Bennett and also in the mix.

Meanwhile, the secondary brings back Marcus Allen, Kaleb Cost and Will Hardy but will rely on transfers like Thaddeus Dixon (Washington) and Gavin Gibson (East Carolina) to solidify the back end. Chemistry, leadership and physicality remain major concerns given all the turnover.

SPECIALISTS The special teams will be a mix of experience and uncertainty. Aussie Tom Maginness returns as punter and holder, providing some stability. Marshall transfer Rece Verhoff takes over placekicking duties after a strong finish to 2024, when he connected on 13 of his final 15 field goals and drilled a 49-yarder in overtime against James Madison. In the return game, Chris Culliver and Javarius Green provide explosive potential on kickoffs, while Hardy is a safe, albeit unspectacular, option on punt returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Tar Heels' 2025 roster is full of turnover and question marks, and early recruiting returns under new head coach Bill Belichick — who issued no jersey numbers in the spring, telling players they had to "earn it" — have been underwhelming. Until UNC shows real on-field success, top prospects may continue to look elsewhere.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 ACC)

Aug. 29	at Minnesota	W	19-17
Sept. 7	Charlotte	W	38-20
Sept. 14	North Carolina Cen.	W	45-10
Sept. 21	James Madison	L	50-70
Sept. 28	at Duke	L	20-21
Oct. 5	Pitt	L	24-34
Oct. 12	Georgia Tech	L	34-41
Oct. 26	at Virginia	W	41-14
Nov. 2	at Florida State	W	35-11
Nov. 16	Wake Forest	W	31-24
Nov. 23	at Boston College	L	21-41
Nov. 30	NC State	L	30-35
Dec. 28	vs. UConn #	L	14-27

#Fenway Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	TCU
Sept. 6	at Charlotte
Sept. 13	Richmond
Sept. 20	at UCF
Oct. 4	Clemson
Oct. 17	at Cal
Oct. 25	Virginia
Oct. 31	at Syracuse
Nov. 8	Stanford
Nov. 15	at Wake Forest
Nov. 22	Duke
Nov. 29	at NC State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bryce Baker, QB	★★★★
2.	Kenedy Uzoma, TE	★★★
3.	Austin Alexander, EDGE	★★★
4.	Javion Butts, S	★★★
5.	Au'Tori Newkirk, QB	★★★
6.	Chinedu Onyeagoro, EDGE	★★★
7.	Byron Nelson, IOL	★★★
8.	Tyler Houser, LB	★★★
9.	Yasir Smith, EDGE	★★★
10.	Madrid Tucker, WR	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bill Belichick • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Freddie Kitchens
Defensive Coordinator: Steve Belichick • Location: Chapel Hill, N.C.
Stadium: Kenan Stadium (50,500)

KOBE PAYSOUR

SCOUTING THE TAR HEELS

"Honestly, no one really has any idea what to expect on the field when they start this season. How Bill [Belichick] adjusts to the structure of the college game is gonna be crucial. It's less time you get with the players, which means it's less football intelligence. The real interesting piece we're watching is how [GM Michael] Lombardi and the coaches approach the NIL portion. They've been vocal about criticizing other programs on how they spend and evaluate. There's talk about how they're going to become an advanced, pro-level scouting program that implements NIL better. We'll see. We do expect a better overall haul from these guys in high school recruiting than from Mack [Brown], at least until the novelty wears off or Bill gets a bad reputation."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	Jordan Shipp (So.)	Chris Culliver (Jr.)
WR	**KOBE PAYSOUR (SR.)**	Paul Billups II (So.)
WR	Aziah Johnson (So.)	Javarius Green (Fr.)
LT	Will O'Steen (Sr.)	Miles McVay (So.)
LG	**AIDAN BANFIELD (SO.)**	Chad Lindberg (Sr.)
C	**AUSTIN BLASKE (SR.)**	Christo Kelly (Sr.)
RG	Daniel King (Sr.)	Byron Nelson (Fr.)
RT	**TREVYON GREEN (JR.)**	William Boone (Jr.)
TE	Jake Johnson (Jr.)	Connor Cox (So.)
QB	Gio Lopez (So.)	Bryce Baker (Fr.)
RB	Davion Gause (So.)	Caleb Hood (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	Smith Vilbert (Sr.)	Joseph Mupoyi (So.)
NT	CJ Mims (Jr.)	Peter Pesansky (Fr.)
DT	D'Antre Robinson (So.)	Isaiah Johnson (Jr.)
RUSH	Pryce Yates (Sr.)	Tyler Thompson (So.)
MLB	Mikai Gbayor (Sr.)	Evan Bennett (Fr.)
WLB	Khmori House (So.)	Evan Bennett (Fr.)
CB	**MARCUS ALLEN (SR.)**	Jalon Thompson (So.)
CB	Thaddeus Dixon (Sr.)	Ty Adams (So.)
NB	**KALEB COST (JR.)**	Tre Miller (So.)
SS	Gavin Gibson (Sr.)	Malcolm Ziglar (So.)
FS	Will Hardy (Sr.)	Coleman Bryson (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	Rece Verhoff (Sr.)	KR	Chris Culliver (Jr.)
P	Tom Maginness (Sr.)	PR	Will Hardy (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BOB DONNAN-IMAGN IMAGES

CJ BAILEY

TOMMY GILLIGAN-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE WOLFPACK

"This is one of the most consistent programs in our league. Dave [Doeren] has done a great job adjusting and rebuilding the roster over the years. The issue has always been how NC State is perceived. They'll have really strong seasons with breakout guys, and then they always fail to take that next, bigger step. ... Right now, it's easier to justify them being in that eight-win range because they're lagging in NIL. The expectations and reality are pretty far off in that regard. ... Keeping the QB [CJ Bailey] was a big step to building for the future. He was a big positive for them after the Grayson McCall experiment didn't pan out. ... There's always talent on these rosters, and it's always a step behind the top programs in the league."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	8	Keenan Jackson (So.)	9	Terrell Anderson (So.)
WR	**5**	**NOAH ROGERS (SO.)**	84	Je'rel Bolder (Fr.)
WR	6	Wesley Grimes (Sr.)	12	Teddy Hoffmann (Fr.)
LT	**65**	**JACARRIUS PEAK (JR.)**	64	Rico Jackson (So.)
LG	**75**	**ANTHONY CARTER JR. (SR.)**	66	Matt McCabe (Sr.)
C	74	Jalen Grant (Sr.)	72	Spike Sowells (Fr.)
RG	54	Val Erickson (Jr.)	79	Kamen Smith (So.)
RT	56	Teague Andersen (So.)	78	Trent Mitchell (Fr.)
TE	**7**	**JUSTIN JOLY (SR.)**	44	Cody Hardy (Sr.)
QB	**16**	**CJ BAILEY (SO.)**	12	Lex Thomas (So.)
RB	**3**	**HOLLYWOOD SMOTHERS (SO.)**	24	Jayden Scott (Fr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	88	Isaiah Shirley (So.)	45	J. Alexander-Felton (Fr.)
NT	**44**	**BRANDON CLEVELAND (SR.)**	52	Chazz Wallace (Sr.)
DE	**13**	**TRAVALI PRICE (SR.)**	43	AJ Prim (So.)
SLB	4	Tra Thomas (Sr.)		Cian Slone (Sr.)
MLB	**10**	**CADEN FORDHAM (SR.)**	35	AJ Richardson (Jr.)
WLB	**0**	**SEAN BROWN (SR.)**	36	Kelvon McBride (So.)
CB	6	Devon Marshall (Sr.)	3	Renté Hinton (Sr.)
CB	21	Jamel Johnson (Sr.)	22	Jackson Vick (Jr.)
NB	14	Jaren Sensabaugh (Fr.)	26	Asaad Brown Jr. (Fr.)
SS	2	Ronnie Royal III (Fr.)	20	Daemon Fagan (So.)
FS	16	JJ Johnson (Sr.)	3	Renté Hinton (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Kanoah Vinesett (Jr.)	KR	3 Hollywood Smothers (So.)
P	98	Caden Noonkester (Sr.)	PR	14 Jonathan Paylor (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NC STATE WOLFPACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 54 | ACC PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE NC State's offense will have a new feel this season under Kurt Roper, who was promoted from quarterbacks coach to offensive coordinator in the offseason. It's been eight years since Roper called an offense, but he's tasked with improving a unit that was 62nd in scoring (28.5 points per game) a year ago.

Sophomore quarterback CJ Bailey will lead the attack after starting eight games in his first season of college football. He can build off last season with a core of playmakers around him, including senior tight end Justin Joly, sophomore wide receiver Noah Rogers and sophomore running back Hollywood Smothers.

Joly was the Wolfpack's leading receiver with 661 yards and four touchdowns, while Smothers emerged as the top running back down the stretch, amassing 834 yards from scrimmage and eight scores. The expectation is that both will be featured pieces of Roper's up-tempo offense.

DEFENSE Like the offense, NC State's defense is breaking in a new coordinator in D.J. Eliot. The veteran defensive play-caller is looking to bring his pressure-based scheme to Raleigh, where getting after the quarterback is key to the unit's ability to wreak havoc.

Senior nose tackle Brandon Cleveland is set to anchor the defensive line, while redshirt seniors Sean Brown and Caden Fordham will lead the team's linebacker corps. Temple transfer linebacker Tra Thomas, who will likely spend most of his time at edge, impressed this past spring.

The Wolfpack will boast a largely new secondary as the transfer portal took most of the starters. Former FCS Villanova transfer Devon Marshall emerged as a consistent cornerback for the Pack a year ago and is set to start. Watch for young defensive backs like redshirt freshmen Ronnie Royal III and Jaren Sensabaugh to make waves this fall.

SPECIALISTS Punter Caden Noonkester, placekicker Kanoah Vinesett and long-snapper Aiden Arias are set for another season with the Pack. Noonkester averaged 43.6 yards per boot, dropping 18 inside the 20-yard line and launching 14 punts of 50-plus yards. Vinesett is entering his second season as NC State's starting placekicker. He was 18-of-24 on field-goal attempts with a long of 52 a year ago. He was a perfect 34-for-34 on PATs and was 14-for-16 on field-goal attempts under 40 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS With two new coordinators, NC State is bound to look different on the field in 2025. The Wolfpack want to operate fast on offense, while getting sacks and tackles for a loss in bunches on defense. It'll be interesting to see which side of the ball emerges as this team's strength, but the offense, led by Bailey, seems to have the upper hand so far.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 ACC)

Aug. 29	Western Carolina	W	38-21
Sept. 7	vs. Tennessee #	L	10-51
Sept. 14	Louisiana Tech	W	30-20
Sept. 21	at Clemson	L	35-59
Sept. 28	Northern Illinois	W	24-17
Oct. 5	Wake Forest	L	30-34
Oct. 12	Syracuse	L	17-24
Oct. 19	at Cal	W	24-23
Nov. 2	Stanford	W	59-28
Nov. 9	Duke	L	19-29
Nov. 21	at Georgia Tech	L	29-30
Nov. 30	at North Carolina	W	35-30
Dec. 28	vs. East Carolina %	L	21-26

#Charlotte, N.C. %Military Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	East Carolina
Sept. 6	Virginia
Sept. 11	at Wake Forest
Sept. 20	at Duke
Sept. 27	Virginia Tech
Oct. 4	Campbell
Oct. 11	at Notre Dame
Oct. 25	at Pitt
Nov. 1	Georgia Tech
Nov. 15	at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 21	Florida State
Nov. 29	North Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Isaac Sowells, IOL	★★★★
2.	Terris Dudley, LB	★★★★
3.	Je'rel Bolder, WR	★★★★
4.	Ta'Khyian Whitset, OT	★★★★
5.	Michael Gibbs, IOL	★★★
6.	AJ Prim, DL	★★★
7.	Deandre Desinor, RB	★★★
8.	Will Wilson, QB	★★★
9.	Colby Cronk, EDGE	★★★
10.	Gerritt Kemp, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Doeren • Record at School: 87-65 (12 years)
Career Record: 110-69 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kurt Roper
Defensive Coordinator: D.J. Eliot • Location: Raleigh, N.C.
Stadium: Carter-Finley Stadium (56,919)

PITT PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 47 | ACC PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE Quarterback Eli Holstein endured a roller-coaster freshman season. The Alabama transfer saw a 7-0 start — during which he completed 64% of his passes for 1,808 yards with 17 TDs — devolve into an 0-6 finish. Holstein and the Panthers are embracing a new mantra: Unfinished Business.

Despite the late falloff, Holstein led a unit that jumped 83 spots to a tie for 31st nationally in scoring (32.9 ppg) in coordinator Kade Bell's up-tempo system. A nagging ankle injury was surgically repaired this offseason.

Like Holstein, senior tailback Desmond Reid prospered when healthy. In 11 games, the diminutive back amassed 962 rushing yards (5.3 ypc), 579 receiving yards (11.1 ypr) and 159 yards on punt returns (12.2 per return). He was named a second-team All-American after finishing tied for fifth nationally with an average of 154.9 all-purpose yards per game. While Reid and Holstein form an intriguing Big 2, who's No. 3? It could be a combination of wide receivers Kenny Johnson (537 receiving yards, three TDs) and Raphael "Poppi" Williams Jr. (426, six). The line, plagued by injuries last season, added three potential starters via the portal.

DEFENSE As a sophomore, Kyle Louis was named an All-American and first-team All-ACC. He finished third in conference Defensive Player of the Year balloting and was the only non-senior among the top-five vote-getters. Along with 101 tackles, he led Pittsburgh in tackles for a loss (15.5), sacks (7.0) and interceptions (four). He also added a pick-6 and returned a blocked extra point for a defensive two-point conversion.

Along with fellow All-ACC selection Rasheem Biles (82 tackles, 15 TFLs, six sacks), Louis leads a unit that must improve its national ranking in points (28.4 ppg, 92nd) and yards (378.2 ypg, 81st) allowed.

The interior is solid with returning tackles Sean FitzSimmons and Nick James. Jimmy Scott and transfers Blaine Spires (Utah State) and Jaeden Moore (Oregon) fortify the end positions.

Safety Cruce Brookins, a big hitter, leads a secondary that is unsettled at cornerback. Sophomore Shadarian Harrison, a star in spring drills, could solidify one of the spots.

SPECIALISTS FCS Murray State transfer James London (14-of-19 on field-goal attempts in 2024) replaces Ben Sauls (21-of-24) as Pitt's placekicker. Caleb Junko returns after averaging 43.7 yards on 58 punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS If Holstein and Reid remain healthy, Pitt should improve on its two-year record of 10-15 (5-11 in the ACC). But by how much? Head coach Pat Narduzzi has averaged seven wins and five losses during his Pitt tenure, which is about what should be expected in '25.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 ACC)

Aug. 31	Kent State	W	55-24
Sept. 7	at Cincinnati	W	28-27
Sept. 14	West Virginia	W	38-34
Sept. 21	Youngstown State	W	73-17
Oct. 5	at North Carolina	W	34-24
Oct. 12	California	W	27-15
Oct. 24	Syracuse	W	41-13
Nov. 2	at SMU	L	25-48
Nov. 9	Virginia	L	19-24
Nov. 16	Clemson	L	20-24
Nov. 23	at Louisville	L	9-37
Nov. 30	at Boston College	L	23-34
Dec. 26	vs. Toledo # (ot)	L	46-48

#Game Above Sports Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Duquesne
Sept. 6	Central Michigan
Sept. 13	at West Virginia
Sept. 27	Louisville
Oct. 4	Boston College
Oct. 11	at Florida State
Oct. 18	at Syracuse
Oct. 25	NC State
Nov. 1	at Stanford
Nov. 15	Notre Dame
Nov. 22	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 29	Miami (Fla.)

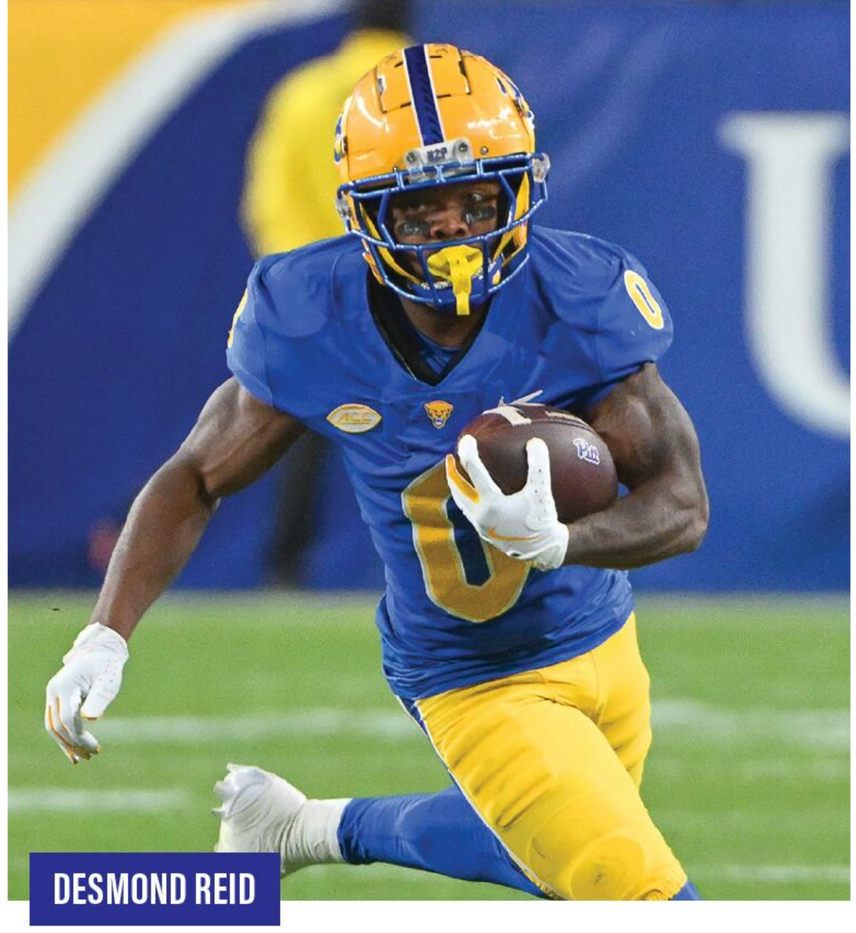
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Mason Heintschel, QB	★★★★
2.	Cole Woodson, S	★★★★
3.	Emmanuel Taylor, LB	★★★
4.	Joshua Guerrier, CB	★★★
5.	Tony Kinsler, WR	★★★
6.	Shep Turk, IOL	★★★
7.	Jordan Fields, OT	★★★
8.	Max Hunt, TE	★★★
9.	Synkwan Smith, ATH	★★★
10.	Justin Thompson, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pat Narduzzi • Record at School: 72-56 (10 years)
Career Record: 72-56 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kade Bell
Defensive Coordinator: Randy Bates • Location: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Stadium: Acrisure Stadium (68,400)



DESMOND REID

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"Last season was the perfect headache for that staff. They wanted to commit to change and brought in a really good OC who made that side of the ball look a lot more modern than some of what we've seen from [Pat] Narduzzi. They started hot, took a ton of injuries and fell apart down the stretch so badly some people thought he'd be let go. ... If they can keep the offensive line and quarterback healthy, they're a lot closer to the 7-0 team from last year. You know what you're getting against those guys on defense, so the real X-factor here is how [OC] Kade Bell develops [Eli] Holstein and keeps him healthy. He was really starting to take off before the injuries. They could be a lot better this season if they aren't as banged up, basically."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	2	**KENNY JOHNSON (JR.)**	23	Zion Fowler-El (So.)
WR	11	Censere Lee (Sr.)	22	Deuce Spann (Sr.)
WR	5	**RAPHAEL WILLIAMS JR. (SR.)**	81	Catuarus Hicks (So.)
LT	78	Jeff Persi (Sr.)	72	Isaiah Montgomery (Jr.)
LG	53	Kendall Stanley (Jr.)	76	Caleb Holmes (Fr.)
C	56	**LYNDON COOPER (SR.)**	66	Keith Gouveia (Sr.)
RG	55	**BJ WILLIAMS (JR.)**	71	Ryan Carretta (So.)
RT	70	**RYAN BAER (JR.)**	77	Jackson Brown (Jr.)
TE	87	Jake Overman (Sr.)	82	Malachi Thomas (So.)
QB	10	**ELI HOLSTEIN (SO.)**	6	Mason Heintschel (Fr.)
RB	0	**DESMOND REID (SR.)**	25	Ja'Kyrian Turner (Fr.)

DEFENSE (7)

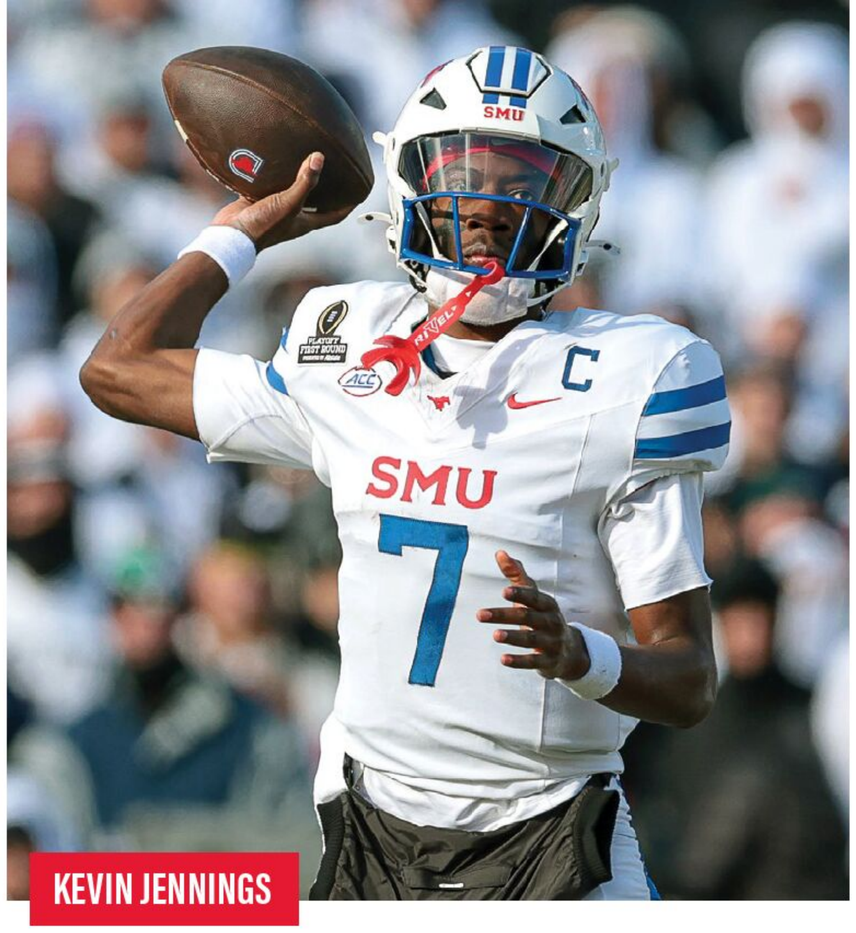
DE	10	Blaine Spires (Sr.)	6	Nate Temple (Sr.)
DT	55	**SEAN FITZSIMMONS (JR.)**	97	Isaiah Neal (So.)
DT	11	**NICK JAMES (JR.)**	95	Francis Brewu (So.)
DE	44	**JIMMY SCOTT (JR.)**	56	Jaeden Moore (So.)
LB	31	**RASHEEM BILES (JR.)**	59	Nick Lapi (Sr.)
LB	0	Braylan Lovelace (Jr.)	32	Jeremiah Marcelin (So.)
LB	9	**KYLE LOUIS (JR.)**	24	Cameron Lindsey (Fr.)
CB	8	Tamon Lynum (Sr.)	18	Rashan Murray (Sr.)
CB	15	**RASHAD BATTLE (SR.)**	21	Shadarian Harrison (So.)
SS	12	Cruce Brookins (So.)	20	Kavir Bains-Marquez (Sr.)
FS	7	**JAVON MCINTYRE (SR.)**	16	Jesse Anderson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	83	James London (Jr.)	KR	24 Tyreek Robinson (Fr.)
P	91	Caleb Junko (Sr.)	PR	0 Desmond Reid (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BARRY REEGER-IMAGN IMAGES



KEVIN JENNINGS

SCOUTING THE MUSTANGS

"This program is a case study on how to move up in college football. You invest first, have your NIL ready and shop the portal, and it helps to be in arguably the best state for high school recruiting. ... [QB] Kevin Jennings doesn't get enough attention. Unless [Jennings] is injured, I don't think [Tyler] Van Dyke will see the field this season. This offense is playoff-caliber; the real place where they're still a step from legitimacy is defense. You really saw it against Penn State. The only spot where they didn't look Power 4-ready was up front, and they've reworked that line with personnel. They're a threat to go back to the championship game, and right now it looks like they're a top-end program in the league for the near future."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	2	Jordan Hudson (Sr.)	9	Jalen Cooper (Fr.)
WR	3	Romello Brinson (Sr.)	13	Daylon Singleton (Fr.)
WR		Link Rhodes (Fr.)	15	Jaxson Lavender (So.)
LT	54	**SAVION BYRD (SR.)**		Dramodd Odoms (Fr.)
LG	71	**LOGAN PARR (SR.)**	77	Alex Woods (So.)
C	63	Addison Nichols (Jr.)	50	Graham Uter (Fr.)
RG	69	Nate Anderson (Sr.)	64	Joshua Bates (So.)
RT	59	**PJ WILLIAMS (JR.)**	74	Andrew Chamblee (Jr.)
TE	82	**RJ MARYLAND (SR.)**	88	**MATTHEW HIBNER (SR.)**
QB	7	**KEVIN JENNINGS (JR.)**	16	Tyler Van Dyke (Sr.)
RB	0	Derrick McFall (Fr.)	24	Chris Johnson Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	1	Isaiah Smith (Sr.)	32	Billy Walton III (So.)
DT	6	Jeffrey M'ba (Sr.)	94	Jonathan Jefferson (Sr.)
DT	4	Terry Webb (Sr.)	34	Damarjhe Lewis (Sr.)
DE	9	Cameron Robertson (Sr.)	58	Trey Wilson (Jr.)
LB	54	Alexander Kilgore (Jr.)	29	Brandon Miyazono (Jr.)
LB	33	Zakye Barker (Jr.)	28	Brandon Booker (So.)
CB	7	**DEUCE HARMON (SR.)**	0	William Nettles (Fr.)
CB	8	Marcellus Barnes Jr. (Fr.)	13	Jaelyn Davis-Robinson (Jr.)
NB	15	La'Modrick Spencer (Jr.)	21	Kyron Chambers (Jr.)
S	23	**ISAIAH NWOKOBIA (SR.)**	11	Jaden Milliner-Jones (Jr.)
S	3	Ahmaad Moses (Sr.)	10	Tyren Polley (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Collin Rogers (Sr.)	KR	24 Chris Johnson Jr. (So.)
P	43	Wade McSparron (Fr.)	PR	18 Randy Reece (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

SMU MUSTANGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 24 | ACC PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 8-0 ACC

OFFENSE SMU's offense rolled last year once Kevin Jennings was inserted as the starting quarterback. Jennings enters this season as a Heisman Trophy dark horse and with almost an entire year of starting experience running the show. With his ability to extend plays, SMU's offense should be dynamic again, if he can cut down on the turnovers in bigger games. He committed a combined five turnovers against Clemson and Penn State in the final two games of the season.

Replacing Brashard Smith (1,332 rushing yards, 14 touchdowns) will fall on unproven players like redshirt freshman Derrick McFall, Miami (Fla.) transfer Chris Johnson Jr., UCLA transfer TJ Harden and true freshman Dramekco Green.

There's little proven production from the running backs, so the SMU passing attack, led by contributors like wide receivers Jordan Hudson and Romello Brinson and tight ends RJ Maryland and Matthew Hibner, will need to start fast.

DEFENSE SMU's defense lost a slew of production and talent off last year's elite group. The question will be whether key transfers and a handful of veteran returners can keep the unit among the nation's best after the Mustangs ranked 26th nationally in total defense (326 ypg).

Led by talented pass-rushers like Isaiah Smith and Cameron Robertson, SMU has proven talent on the edge, while interior defensive linemen like Jeffrey M'ba, Terry Webb and Jonathan Jefferson are sturdy.

At linebacker, Alexander Kilgore looks like he could emerge as a star after posting 56 tackles last season. Ahmaad Moses and Isaiah Nwokobia form one of the top safety tandems in the country, while the cornerback group will need Deuce Harmon to elevate his game.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Collin Rogers emerged as a weapon for the Mustangs, setting the program record for most made field goals in a single season in converting 24-of-33 attempts. Seven of those were from 50 yards or more, another SMU record. Punter Wade McSparron and long-snapper Morgan Tribett are new, as are the punt and kickoff returners.

FINAL ANALYSIS SMU should be among the favorites to win the ACC Championship with Jennings back. If he takes better care of the ball and the Mustangs find a strong running game again, the offense will be potent. Defensively, the secondary could be much improved, which will have to make up for a defensive line that might not be as deep as it was last year. Nevertheless, head coach Rhett Lashlee's team has all the makings of a strong College Football Playoff contender. Expectations should be high.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 8-0 ACC)

Aug. 24	at Nevada	W	29-24
Aug. 31	Houston Christian	W	59-7
Sept. 6	BYU	L	15-18
Sept. 21	TCU	W	66-42
Sept. 28	Florida State	W	42-16
Oct. 5	at Louisville	W	34-27
Oct. 19	at Stanford	W	40-10
Oct. 26	at Duke (ot)	W	28-27
Nov. 2	Pitt	W	48-25
Nov. 16	Boston College	W	38-28
Nov. 23	at Virginia	W	33-7
Nov. 30	Cal	W	38-6
Dec. 7	vs. Clemson #	L	31-34
Dec. 21	at Penn State %	L	10-38

#Charlotte, N.C. %CFB Playoff First Round

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	East Texas A&M
Sept. 6	Baylor
Sept. 13	at Missouri State
Sept. 20	at TCU
Oct. 4	Syracuse
Oct. 11	Stanford
Oct. 18	at Clemson
Oct. 25	at Wake Forest
Nov. 1	Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 8	at Boston College
Nov. 22	Louisville
Nov. 29	at Cal

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dramodd Odoms, OT	★★★★
2.	Jalen Cooper, WR	★★★★
3.	Dramekco Green, RB	★★★★
4.	Daylon Singleton, WR	★★★
5.	Kyle Ferm, LB	★★★
6.	Ty Hawkins, QB	★★★
7.	Jalen Shivers, EDGE	★★★
8.	Carterrious Brown, WR	★★★
9.	Link Rhodes, WR	★★★
10.	Javion Holiday, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rhett Lashlee • Record at School: 29-12 (3 years)
Career Record: 29-12 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Casey Woods
Defensive Coordinator: Scott Symons • Location: Dallas, Texas
Stadium: Gerald J. Ford Stadium (32,000)

STANFORD CARDINAL

NATIONAL FORECAST: 99 | ACC PREDICTION: 17 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE The Stanford Cardinal have had a very eventful offseason. Head coach Troy Taylor was fired after back-to-back 3-9 seasons and an investigation into his treatment of female staffers. General manager Andrew Luck replaced Taylor with veteran NFL head coach Frank Reich on an interim basis. Reich and Luck go back to their days with the Indianapolis Colts, creating a strong bond and relationship of trust.

The Cardinal also lost some pieces to the transfer portal, notably wide receiver Emmett Mosley V, who had a strong freshman season, and starting quarterback Ashton Daniels, who transferred to Auburn. With Daniels gone, redshirt freshman Elijah Brown is the front-runner to start.

Stanford added some key pieces via the portal — most notably senior wide receiver CJ Williams (Wisconsin), fifth-year running back Tuna Altahir (FCS Eastern Washington) and junior offensive lineman Niki Prongos (UCLA). Williams projects to be the top target.

A loaded running back room also includes sophomores Micah Ford, Cole Tabb and Chris Davis Jr. and junior Sedrick Irvin Jr. Transfer wideouts Jordan Onovughe and Caden High bring more playmaking ability. Tight end is looking strong with senior Sam Roush and junior Chico Holt leading the way.

DEFENSE Under co-defensive coordinators Bobby April and Andy Thompson, Stanford will look to make things tough on opposing offenses with its pass rush and coverage against the deep ball.

Outside linebacker Tevarua Tafiti, safety Jay Green and cornerback Collin Wright are the anchors of the defense. Green looks fully recovered from a knee injury, while Tafiti and Wright hope to build on strong 2024 seasons. Cornerback Brandon Nicholson is also emerging as a guy Stanford can trust to make plays.

Up front, ends Zach Buckey and Anthony Franklin and tackles Braden Marceau-Olayinka and Zach Rowell give the Cardinal a solid quartet at the point of attack. There's a lot of depth at linebacker with guys like Matt Rose, Jahsiah Galvan and Wilfredo Aybar looking like impact players.

SPECIALISTS Emmet Kenney blossomed into a reliable placekicker last season, making 14-of-17 (82.4%) field-goal attempts and all 32 of his extra points. Aidan Flintoft should grow into a dependable punter. Davis and Nicholson are likely to get action in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's an intriguing season ahead for Stanford. Reich is looking to bring energy, while Luck is eager to implement his vision for the program. Coming off four straight 3-9 seasons, four-plus wins would indicate that things are starting to move in the right direction.

MICAH FORD

SCOUTING THE CARDINAL

"Troy Taylor wasn't a bad coach, but he wasn't the right fit at a place this unique. He was doing a solid job with national recruiting, and they were planning on a slow-and-steady kind of development with the roster before he was fired. ... No one thinks [Frank] Reich is a long-term answer, but it's not impossible. Reich is Andrew Luck's guy, and this is Luck's program now. They want to make a really smart hire here to try to bring back that [Jim] Harbaugh and [David] Shaw era of development and consistency, but in the portal era, I'm not sure if that's possible or not. But this season is a mulligan, and they're trying to keep from losing their roster."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	8	CJ Williams (Sr.)	4	Jordan Onovughe (So.)
WR	14	Caden High (Jr.)		JonAnthony Hall (Fr.)
LT	66	Niki Prongos (Jr.)	67	Fisher Anderson (Sr.)
LG	**55**	**SIMIONE PALE (JR.)**	59	Charlie Hoitink (So.)
C	51	Ziron Brown (So.)	59	Charlie Hoitink (So.)
RG	**76**	**JACK LEYRER (SR.)**	73	Charlie Symonds (Jr.)
RT	**58**	**KAHILI HOUSE (SO.)**	79	Kai Greer (Fr.)
TE	**86**	**SAM ROUSH (SR.)**	80	Brendan Doyle (Sr.)
TE	46	Chico Holt (Jr.)	88	Benji Blackburn (So.)
QB	2	Elijah Brown (Fr.)	9	Myles Jackson (So.)
RB	**20**	**MICAH FORD (SO.)**	6	Tuna Altahir (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	98	Zach Buckey (Sr.)	95	Adam Shovlin (Fr.)
DT	75	Braden Marceau-Olayinka (Jr.)	91	Clay Patterson (Sr.)
DT	97	Zach Rowell (Sr.)	91	Clay Patterson (Sr.)
DE	**94**	**ANTHONY FRANKLIN (SR.)**	95	Adam Shovlin (Fr.)
OLB	**11**	**TEVARUA TAFITI (SR.)**	2	Dylan Stephenson (So.)
MLB	35	Matt Rose (Sr.)	43	Jahsiah Galvan (Jr.)
OLB	14	Wilfredo Aybar (Sr.)	**44**	**ERNEST COOPER (SR.)**
CB	**6**	**COLLIN WRIGHT (SR.)**	31	Aaron Morris (Jr.)
CB	9	Brandon Nicholson (So.)	28	Cam Richardson (So.)
S	5	Jay Green (Sr.)	18	Jaylen'Dai Sumlin (So.)
S	**32**	**MITCH LEIGBER (SR.)**	**21**	**SCOTTY EDWARDS (SR.)**
SPECIALISTS				
K	13	Emmet Kenney (Sr.)	KR	5	Chris Davis Jr. (So.)
P	37	Aidan Flintoft (Jr.)	PR	9	Brandon Nicholson (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 ACC)

Aug. 30	TCU	L	27-34
Sept. 7	Cal Poly	W	41-7
Sept. 20	at Syracuse	W	26-24
Sept. 28	at Clemson	L	14-40
Oct. 5	Virginia Tech	L	7-31
Oct. 12	at Notre Dame	L	7-49
Oct. 19	SMU	L	10-40
Oct. 26	Wake Forest	L	24-27
Nov. 2	at NC State	L	28-59
Nov. 16	Louisville	W	38-35
Nov. 23	at Cal	L	21-24
Nov. 29	at San José State	L	31-34

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	at Hawai'i
Sept. 6	at BYU
Sept. 13	Boston College
Sept. 20	at Virginia
Sept. 27	San José State
Oct. 11	at SMU
Oct. 18	Florida State
Oct. 25	at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 1	Pitt
Nov. 8	at North Carolina
Nov. 22	Cal
Nov. 29	Notre Dame

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	JonAnthony Hall, WR	★★★★
2.	Bear Bachmeier, QB	★★★★
3.	Nusi Taumoepeau, EDGE	★★★
4.	Josh Williams, IOL	★★★
5.	Adam Shovlin, DL	★★★
6.	Reiman Zebert, TE	★★★
7.	Emeka Ugorji, OT	★★★
8.	Gabe Kaminski, EDGE	★★★
9.	Mickey Vaccarello, LB	★★★
10.	Lonnie McAllister III, CB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Frank Reich • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Nate Byham
Defensive Coordinators: Bobby April, Andy Thompson • Location: Palo Alto, Calif. • Stadium: Stanford Stadium (50,424)

SERGIO ESTRADA-IMAGN IMAGES

DUCE CHESTNUT

RICH BARNES-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOUTING THE ORANGE

"The biggest culture change at a program in our league, for sure. Fran [Brown] is a rising star, and he's attacking recruiting and the portal in a way that program has never seen. But don't expect another 10-win season this year. Right now, their roster looks like it's going to be a little less talented as they transition into a more consistent approach to recruiting high school. ... They're not a really good run team, and it's going to hurt them more with an inexperienced quarterback. ... The defense is missing a lot of the guys who stood out for them last year. They're very shaky as a secondary. ... The good news is that they're aggressive about scouting talent. If they somehow keep the same level of offensive production, they could go bowling again."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	82	Darrell Gill Jr. (Jr.)	3	Jaylan Hornsby (Fr.)
WR	5	Umari Hatcher (Sr.)	12	Justus Ross-Simmons (Sr.)
WR	8	Tyshawn Russell (So.)	18	Emanuel Ross (Fr.)
LT	75	Trevion Mack (So.)	60	Naquil Betrand (So.)
LG	73	Joshua Miller (So.)	77	Byron Washington (Fr.)
C	**72**	**MARK PETRY (SR.)**	78	Joe Cruz (Jr.)
RG	78	Joe Cruz (Jr.)	77	Byron Washington (Fr.)
RT	**57**	**DA'METRIUS WEATHERSPOON (SR.)**	60	Naquil Betrand (So.)
TE	89	Dan Villari (Sr.)	0	David Clement (Jr.)
QB	10	Rickie Collins (So.)		Steve Angeli (Sr.)
RB	23	Yasin Willis (So.)	24	Will Nixon (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	11	Denis Jaquez Jr. (Sr.)	30	Chase Simmons (Sr.)
NT	92	Rashard Perry (Jr.)	4	Dion Wilson Jr. (Sr.)
DT		George Rooks (Jr.)	94	Kevin Jobity Jr. (Sr.)
DE		David Reese (Sr.)	18	David Omopariola (So.)
LB	12	Anwar Sparrow (Sr.)	28	Jahide Lesaine Jr. (So.)
LB	**15**	**DEREK MCDONALD (SR.)**	6	James Heard (So.)
CB	1	Demetres Samuel Jr. (Fr.)	34	Nate Prater (Sr.)
CB	10	Davien Kerr (So.)	32	Greg Delaine (Jr.)
NB	**23**	**DEVIN GRANT (SR.)**	17	Jalil Martin (Jr.)
S	**2**	**DUCE CHESTNUT (SR.)**	0	Braheem Long Jr. (So.)
S	29	Berry Buxton III (Sr.)	19	Cornell Perry (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS					
K	96	Jackson Kennedy (Sr.)	KR	6	Yasin Willis (So.)
P	41	Jack Stonehouse (Sr.)	PR	6	Yasin Willis (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SYRACUSE ORANGE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 57 | ACC PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE Syracuse head coach Fran Brown will look to a transfer quarterback for the second straight year. After former Ohio State standout Kyle McCord led the Orange to a 10-3 record and paced the nation in passing yards last season, Brown named LSU transfer Rickie Collins as the 2025 starter this spring. Collins has appeared in only four games as a backup over two seasons. Transfer Steve Angeli also arrives from Notre Dame to contend for the job.

Two-time All-ACC running back LeQuint Allen is gone, as are the rest of the team's top three receivers from last year (WRs Trebor Pena and Jackson Meeks and TE Oronde Gadsden II).

Pena's decision to transfer after spring ball leaves wide receiver Darrell Gill Jr. as SU's only returning skill-position player who logged at least 275 yards of offense (passing included) in 2024.

DEFENSE The Orange must also replace significant production on the other side of the ball. Six of the 10 players who recorded more than 30 tackles last year are gone, including top tackler Justin Barron (93 total) and leading sack artists Fadil Diggs (7.5) and Marlowe Wax (4.5).

Veteran safety Duce Chestnut, nickelback Devin Grant and linebacker Derek McDonald will be tasked with building up chemistry in the 4-2-5 scheme. Potential impact additions include Cal edge transfer David Reese and two-way freshman Demetres Samuel Jr., who got first-team reps at corner in the spring. The SU defense, despite its losses, has plenty of room for improvement in 2025 after finishing last in the ACC with five yards allowed per rushing attempt.

SPECIALISTS After three players attempted at least four field goals in 2024, SU is once again facing uncertainty at the position. Jackson Kennedy, who made 8-of-11 field goals, is appealing to the NCAA for another year of eligibility. The Orange do bring back one of the ACC's most consistent punters in two-time All-ACC selection Jack Stonehouse. But the team must replace Pena, an experienced return man.

FINAL ANALYSIS While Syracuse was just a win or two away from sniffing the College Football Playoff conversation last year, a return to national prominence in 2025 seems nearly impossible. The Orange draw one of the hardest schedules in the country, including road trips to face Tennessee (in Atlanta), Clemson, SMU, Miami (Fla.) and Notre Dame.

A program that has routinely run out of depth in November for the past decade-plus will need everything to go right to have a chance at repeating its Year 1 success under Brown.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 5-3 ACC)

Aug. 31	Ohio	W	38-22
Sept. 7	Georgia Tech	W	31-28
Sept. 20	Stanford	L	24-26
Sept. 28	Holy Cross	W	42-14
Oct. 4	at UNLV (ot)	W	44-41
Oct. 12	at NC State	W	24-17
Oct. 24	at Pitt	L	13-41
Nov. 2	Virginia Tech (ot)	W	38-31
Nov. 9	at Boston College	L	31-37
Nov. 16	at Cal	W	33-25
Nov. 23	UConn	W	31-24
Nov. 30	Miami (Fla.)	W	42-38
Dec. 27	vs. Washington St. #	W	52-35

#Holiday Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	vs. Tennessee #
Sept. 6	UConn
Sept. 12	Colgate
Sept. 20	at Clemson
Sept. 27	Duke
Oct. 4	at SMU
Oct. 18	Pitt
Oct. 25	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 31	North Carolina
Nov. 8	at Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 22	at Notre Dame
Nov. 29	Boston College

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Demetres Samuel Jr., S	★★★★
2.	Quante Gillians, DL	★★★
3.	Terrell Wilfong, WR	★★★
4.	Jaylen Pray, OT	★★★
5.	Kaylib Singleton, CB	★★★
6.	Javon Lawrence, CB	★★★
7.	Darien Williams, WR	★★★
8.	Haleem Muhammad, DL	★★★
9.	Julian McFadden, WR	★★★
10.	Jordan Gibbs, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Fran Brown • Record at School: 10-3 (1 year)
Career Record: 10-3 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinators: Jeff Nixon, Michael Johnson • Defensive Coordinators: Elijah Robinson, Robert Wright
Location: Syracuse, N.Y. • Stadium: JMA Wireless Dome (42,784)

VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 69 | ACC PREDICTION: 14 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE It's a changing of the guard for Virginia at the quarterback position. Anthony Colandrea and Tony Muskett are out, and North Texas transfer Chandler Morris has arrived to shepherd the UVA offense in a make-or-break season for head coach Tony Elliott. The Cavaliers ranked 16th in the ACC in scoring offense last season at 22.7 points per game — only Florida State was worse. Morris should be an upgrade at the most important position on the field, but what about the rest of the offense?

The Cavaliers lost their top two pass-catchers and leading rusher but added a few impact transfers at the skill positions — receivers Jahmal Edrine (Purdue) and Jayden Thomas (Notre Dame) and running back J'Mari Taylor (FCS North Carolina Central). They'll need returners like Xavier Brown, who averaged 6.1 yards per carry last season, and Trell Harris, who was a bright spot in the downfield passing game before going down with a knee injury, to take big steps forward in 2025.

Most importantly, though, the Cavaliers must see improvement on their offensive line, the team's biggest weakness in the Elliott era. Virginia added some transfers up front, including UAB's Brady Wilson, but the Cavs lost Louisville transfer Monroe Mills to a spring knee injury and starting right tackle Blake Steen to the transfer portal.

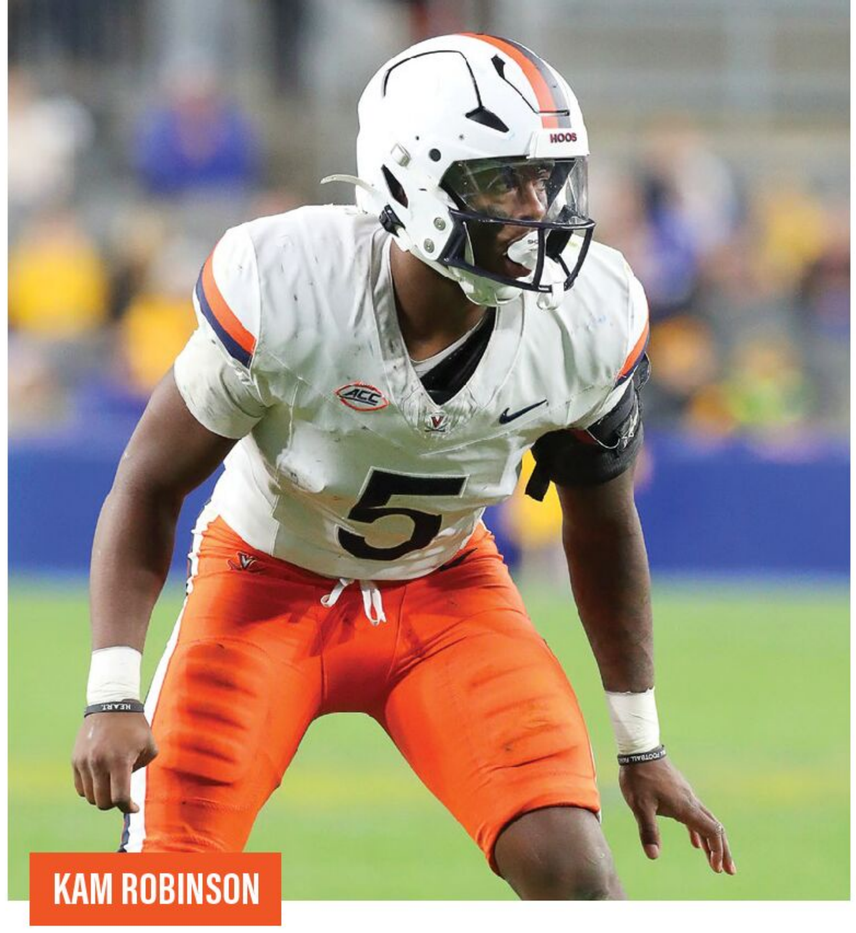
DEFENSE The Cavaliers will have to fill the massive shoes of two-time first-team All-ACC safety Jonas Sanker, but they are set to field perhaps the most experienced safety tandem in the country in Antonio Clary and Louisville transfer Devin Neal.

UVA went to work in the portal to improve its front seven, which ranked near the bottom of the league in sacks for the second year in a row. Mitchell Melton (Ohio State), Cazeem Moore (FCS Elon), Hunter Osborne (Alabama) and Fisher Camac (UNLV) arrive from the portal to reinforce the defensive line, and the Cavaliers bring back all of their key linebackers, including second-leading tackler Kam Robinson.

The cornerback position may be an issue, but the pieces are there for UVA's defense to be much improved in 2025.

SPECIALISTS Virginia brings back all of its kickers and punters from last season and adds PFF All-America long snapper Bryce Robinson from Kennesaw State. UVA lost its primary returners but brought in James Madison transfer Cam Ross, who returned a kickoff for a score last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS On paper, the Cavaliers have upgraded at quarterback and on both sides of the trenches. UVA also has a manageable non-conference schedule and avoids the top-four finishers in the ACC from last season. It's bowl or bust for Elliott in Year 4 at Virginia.



KAM ROBINSON

SCOUTING THE CAVALIERS

"These guys are in trouble, and most everyone expects there to be a staff change at the end of the season or earlier. ... They've never delivered on the offensive expectations Tony [Elliott] set coming from Clemson. They're sloppy on both sides of the ball, and we've seen some talented players come in, underperform and move on. ... [Chandler] Morris is a big improvement at QB and could save it for them if he clicks. The problem is they have a really thin line, and their running back left in the portal. There's just not a lot of talent to put around him. ... This is a team you never really worry about playing. They lack discipline, and they have no real identity. The parity in this league is increasing, and it will be really hard for this program to make a sharp turn up."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	11	Trell Harris (Sr.)	2	**ANDRE GREENE JR. (SR.)**
WR	7	Jahmal Edrine (Sr.)	85	Jayden Thomas (Sr.)
WR	5	Kameron Courtney (So.)	1	Suderioan Harrison (Jr.)
LT	52	**MCKALE BOLEY (SR.)**	56	Tyshawn Wyatt (Sr.)
LG	77	**NOAH JOSEY (SR.)**	78	Kevin Wigenton II (Sr.)
C	76	Brady Wilson (Sr.)	58	Noah Hartsoe (Sr.)
RG	60	Drake Metcalf (Sr.)	74	Ethan Sipe (Sr.)
RT		Wallace Unamba (Sr.)		Makilan Thomas (Sr.)
TE	9	Dakota Twitty (Sr.)	0	Sage Ennis (Sr.)
QB	4	Chandler Morris (Sr.)	10	Daniel Kaelin (So.)
RB	20	Xavier Brown (Sr.)	3	J'Mari Taylor (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	6	Cazeem Moore (Sr.)	25	Terrell Jones (Sr.)
NT	90	**JAHMEER CARTER (SR.)**	55	**ANTHONY BRITTON (JR.)**
DT	91	Jason Hammond (Jr.)	15	Hunter Osborne (Jr.)
DE	17	Mitchell Melton (Sr.)	14	Fisher Camac (Sr.)
ILB	7	**JAMES JACKSON (SR.)**	11	Maddox Marcellus (Jr.)
ILB	5	**KAM ROBINSON (JR.)**	16	Trey McDonald (Jr.)
LB/S	26	Caleb Hardy (Jr.)	32	Landon Danley (Jr.)
CB	10	Ja'Son Prevard (Jr.)	29	CJ Spence (Fr.)
CB	9	**JAM JACKSON (SR.)**	1	Dre Walker (Jr.)
SS	0	**ANTONIO CLARY (SR.)**	18	Corey Costner (Fr.)
FS	27	Devin Neal (Sr.)	30	Ethan Minter (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	41	Will Bettridge (Sr.)	KR	6 Cam Ross (Sr.)
P	38	Daniel Sparks (Sr.)	PR	1 Suderian Harrison (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 ACC)

Aug. 31	Richmond	W	34-13
Sept. 7	at Wake Forest	W	31-30
Sept. 14	Maryland	L	13-27
Sept. 21	at Coastal Carolina	W	43-24
Oct. 5	Boston College	W	24-14
Oct. 12	Louisville	L	20-24
Oct. 19	at Clemson	L	31-48
Oct. 26	North Carolina	L	14-41
Nov. 9	at Pitt	W	24-19
Nov. 16	at Notre Dame	L	14-35
Nov. 23	SMU	L	7-33
Nov. 30	at Virginia Tech	L	17-37

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 6	at NC State
Sept. 13	William & Mary
Sept. 20	Stanford
Sept. 26	Florida State
Oct. 4	at Louisville
Oct. 18	Washington State
Oct. 25	at North Carolina
Nov. 1	at Cal
Nov. 8	Wake Forest
Nov. 15	at Duke
Nov. 29	Virginia Tech

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Evan Ward, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Josiah Persinger, CB	★★★★
3.	Bjorn Jurgensen, QB	★★★
4.	Corey Costner, ATH	★★★
5.	Montino Williams, CB	★★★
6.	Jon Adair, IOL	★★★
7.	Dillon Newton-Short, WR	★★★
8.	Josiah Abdullah, WR	★★★
9.	Jim Harris Jr., OT	★★★
10.	Isaiah Reese, LB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Elliott • Record at School: 11-23 (3 years) • Career Record: 11-23 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Ladd
Defensive Coordinator: Kirby Cannon • Location: Charlottesville, Va. • Stadium: Scott Stadium (61,500)

CHARLES LECLAIRE-IMAGN IMAGES

KYRON DRONES

SCOUTING THE HOKIES

"The consensus around the league is, it's not what they want it to be in Blacksburg, and it's harder than it ever was, but if you get the right guy in there, you're gonna roll. The question is can that be [Brent] Pry? Because he's the most Virginia Tech guy they could have. ... [Kyron] Drones is wildly different game to game. Turn on the tape and you see an extremely high level of talent and an extremely high level of inconsistency. ... [Philip] Montgomery will want to simplify things for him; we're curious if they stay run-heavy or spread it out more. ... They have some really nice pieces, especially at the skill positions, compared to what Pry inherited. They're making a lot of slow improvements."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	0	Ayden Greene (Jr.)	11	Tucker Holloway (Jr.)
WR	9	Cameron Seldon (Jr.)	6	Keylen Adams (Fr.)
WR	3	Donavon Greene (Sr.)	7	Chanz Wiggins (Fr.)
LT	79	Johnny Garrett (Jr.)	76	Aidan Lynch (Fr.)
LG	56	Layth Ghannam (So.)	54	Grant Karczewski (So.)
C	62	Kyle Altuner (Fr.)	53	Tommy Ricard (Fr.)
RG	77	Brody Meadows (Jr.)	66	Montavious Cunningham (Sr.)
RT	55	Tomas Rimac (Sr.)	57	Lucas Austin (Fr.)
TE	**82**	**BENJI GOSNELL (JR.)**	87	Harrison Saint Germain (Jr.)
QB	**1**	**KYRON DRONES (SR.)**	5	William "Pop" Watson III (So.)
RB		Terion Stewart (Sr.)	27	Marcellous Hawkins (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	66	James Djonkam (Sr.)	42	Aycen Stevens (So.)
DT	22	Kelvin Gilliam Jr. (Sr.)	99	Emmett Laws (Fr.)
DT	13	Kemari Copeland (Jr.)	92	Arias Nash (Sr.)
DE	33	Ben Bell (Sr.)	2	Keyshawn Burgos (Sr.)
LB	**24**	**JADEN KELLER (SR.)**	41	George Ballance (So.)
LB	**20**	**CALEB WOODSON (JR.)**	3	Kaleb Spencer (Jr.)
CB	1	Dante Lovett (Jr.)	5	Joshua Clarke (Fr.)
CB	23	Thomas Williams (So.)	30	Krystian Williams (So.)
NB	26	Isaiah Brown-Murray (Jr.)	28	Knahlij Harrell (Fr.)
S	0	Quentin Reddish (So.)	7	Sherrod Covil (Sr.)
S	17	Tyson Flowers (Jr.)	4	Christian Ellis (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	John Love (Jr.)	KR	9 Cameron Seldon (Jr.)
P	95	Nick Veltsistas (Sr.)	PR	11 Tucker Holloway (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAM NAVARRO-IMAGN IMAGES

VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 55 | ACC PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE It's a reset offensively for the Hokies, who welcome new coordinator Philip Montgomery. With a quarterback résumé that includes Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III at Baylor, there's hope Montgomery can get the most out of Kyron Drones, who suffered through an injury-plagued 2024, throwing for 10 touchdowns and six interceptions.

Bruising Bowling Green transfer Terion Stewart is expected to headline a rotating backfield. Ayden Greene, who had his first 100-yard effort in the Hokies' bowl game, has star potential in a wideout group that could be interesting if Donavon Greene (Wake Forest) stays healthy and Cameron Seldon (Tennessee) handles a position switch.

Much rides on an overhauled offensive line that lost five starters and brought in Matt Moore as the third O-line coach in head coach Brent Pry's four years. Tomas Rimac, who came with Moore from West Virginia, anchors the group, but major strides are needed here.

DEFENSE After three years, Pry pulled the plug on the Chris Marve experiment at defensive coordinator, hiring up-and-comer Sam Siefkes with hopes of bringing a fresh mindset. Siefkes employs all sorts of fronts and personnel, stressing an attacking approach and situational awareness.

The personnel is an odd mix of returners and transfers. The strength resides up front, where Kelvin Gilliam Jr. and Kemari Copeland hold down the interior and newcomers James Djonkam (Eastern Michigan) and Ben Bell (Texas State) bring edge pressure.

Questions mount in the back seven. Linebacker has been a sore spot since Pry arrived, though Jaden Keller and Caleb Woodson, the leading returning tacklers, bring continuity. With four safety transfers and a young cornerback room, there's uncertainty aplenty in the secondary, though Tech has more depth than last year.

SPECIALISTS All-ACC punt returner Tucker Holloway is back from a right knee injury that cost him all of 2024, bringing a career 15.5-yard average. Kicker John Love went 16-for-18 on field goals last year. Veteran punter Peter Moore is gone, but hopes are high for Nick Veltsistas.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's now or never for Pry, who enters Year 4 with a 16-21 record and failed to launch in 2024 despite a talented roster. Pressure is mounting to have a breakthrough at a program stuck in a decade and a half of mostly malaise. That'll be tough with a lineup that might have better depth in some spots but not nearly the star power of last year's squad. If the coordinator hires don't hit, it might mean another middling season with increased questions about Pry's job security.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 ACC)

Aug. 31	at Vanderbilt (ot)	L	27-34
Sept. 7	Marshall	W	31-14
Sept. 14	at Old Dominion	W	37-17
Sept. 21	Rutgers	L	23-26
Sept. 27	at Miami (Fla.)	L	34-38
Oct. 5	at Stanford	W	31-7
Oct. 17	Boston College	W	42-21
Oct. 26	Georgia Tech	W	21-6
Nov. 2	at Syracuse (ot)	L	31-38
Nov. 9	Clemson	L	14-24
Nov. 23	at Duke	L	28-31
Nov. 30	Virginia	W	37-17
Jan. 3	vs. Minnesota #	L	10-24

#Duke's Mayo Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	vs. South Carolina #
Sept. 6	Vanderbilt
Sept. 13	Old Dominion
Sept. 20	Wofford
Sept. 27	at NC State
Oct. 4	Wake Forest
Oct. 11	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 24	Cal
Nov. 1	Louisville
Nov. 15	at Florida State
Nov. 22	Miami (Fla.)
Nov. 29	at Virginia

#Atlanta, GA

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jeff Overton Jr., RB	★★★★
2.	A.J. Brand, QB	★★★★
3.	Shamarius Peterkin, WR	★★★
4.	Jahmari DeLoatch, CB	★★★
5.	Christian Evans, DL	★★★
6.	Sheldon Robinson, S	★★★
7.	Noah Chambers, LB	★★★
8.	Micah Matthews, WR	★★★
9.	Jayden Anderson, WR	★★★
10.	Sherrod Henderson, EDGE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Pry • Record at School: 16-21 (3 years)
Career Record: 16-21 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Philip Montgomery
Defensive Coordinator: Sam Siefkes • Location: Blacksburg, Va.
Stadium: Lane Stadium (65,632)

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 80 | ACC PREDICTION: 16 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE Goodbye slow mesh; hello power spread. Jake Dickert replacing the retired Dave Clawson as head coach means a farewell to the unique offense Wake Forest deployed for the past decade. In its stead comes a power-option style of offense that's the brainchild of both Dickert and coordinator Rob Ezell. There are spread-option qualities similar to what Wake Forest has run but more emphasis on outside-zone runs.

Which places a premium on senior running back Demond Claiborne, a 1,000-yard rusher last year. He'll be running behind a remade O-line — but at least the Deacons know who the bell cow will be.

What isn't known yet is who the quarterback will be, as Dickert brought in transfers Robby Ashford (South Carolina) and Deshawn Purdie (Charlotte). Whoever it is, he'll be throwing to a crop of new receivers. Micah Mays Jr. is the only returning wideout who saw significant snaps.

DEFENSE Some positions need to be remade, but others have multi-year starters primed to excel in a new system. In Nick Andersen, Dylan Hazen and Davaughn Patterson, Wake Forest returns three of its top four tacklers. Their roles might shift, but they're not short on ACC experience.

The D-line needed reinforcements through the portal, which is where Gabe Kirschke (Colorado State), Dallas Afalava (FCS Idaho) and Jayden Loving (WKU) enter the conversation. The Deacons also needed help at cornerback last year, which is why Lardarius Webb Jr. (South Alabama), Karon Prunty (FCS North Carolina A&T) and Ashaad Williams (FCS North Alabama) were added.

SPECIALISTS Matthew Dennis returns as kicker, having made 42-of-54 field goals (77.8%) over the past three seasons (with a long of 46). The program added Rohan MacNeill, a freshman punter from Australia who will turn 21 during the season.

FINAL ANALYSIS There are plenty of moving parts with a new staff, as should be expected. One theme is uncertainty at QB — though there seems to be more promise with this year's competitors than last year's race between sixth-year options.

The energy level of the program is what matters for Dickert, though. Beyond the back-to-back 4-8 finishes, the feeling around Wake's program was a stale one for the past couple of seasons.

That's no longer the case. There's a renewed and refreshed approach with this team. While nobody expects that to lead to a College Football Playoff berth or even a trip to the ACC Championship Game, it should translate to a bowl berth and some positive momentum for Dickert to build upon.

DEMOND CLAIBORNE

SCOUTING THE DEMON DEACONS

"It's very hard to predict what we'll see this first season, because [Jake] Dickert is attempting a pretty big roster flip. A lot of people want to compare this to what [Curt] Cignetti did coming into Indiana because they brought seven or eight guys from Washington State, but it's a little bit different at Wake. Indiana put way more into NIL up front. Wake isn't a huge player right now. The good news is their roster isn't as bad as that IU team. ... They have a couple good players, but from what we know, it's a totally wide-open audition at every position. ... Dickert made a ton of sense on paper because he succeeded under the strain of what WSU went through, and at Wake you have to do more with less than the bigger ACC programs."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	7	**MICAH MAYS JR. (SO.)**	11	Reginald Vick Jr. (Jr.)
WR	4	Sterling Berkhalter (Sr.)	9	Sawyer Racanelli (Sr.)
WR	8	Carlos Hernandez (Jr.)	10	Chris Barnes (Fr.)
LT	79	Fa'alili Fa'amoe (Sr.)	52	Uber Ajongo (So.)
LG	55	Jacob Dennison (Sr.)	65	Clinton Richard (Fr.)
C	70	Devin Kylany (Sr.)	51	Devin McRae (So.)
RG		Ja'Marion Kennedy (So.)	77	George Sell (Sr.)
RT	71	Melvin Siani (So.)	73	George Steih (So.)
TE	86	Dominic Deluca (Fr.)	46	Kevin Check (Jr.)
QB	2	Robby Ashford (Sr.)	5	Deshawn Purdie (So.)
RB	1	**DEMOND CLAIBORNE (SR.)**	30	Tate Carney (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	10	Gabe Kirschke (Jr.)	18	BJ Williams (Sr.)
DT	91	Jayden Loving (Sr.)	**94**	**ZACH LOHAVICHAN (SR.)**
DT	52	Dallas Afalava (Jr.)	92	Ka'Shawn Thomas (So.)
DE	11	Langston Hardy (Jr.)	90	Camden Hardy (Fr.)
LB	**24**	**DYLAN HAZEN (SR.)**	21	Aiden Hall (Jr.)
LB	9	Quincy Bryant (Sr.)	43	Frank Cusano (Fr.)
CB	3	Karon Prunty (Sr.)	27	Travon West (So.)
CB		Lardarius Webb Jr. (Sr.)		Ashaad Williams (Sr.)
NB	**5**	**DAVAUGHN PATTERSON (SO.)**	17	Zamari Stevenson (Jr.)
S	**45**	**NICK ANDERSEN (SR.)**	22	Myles Turpin (Fr.)
S	6	Rushaun Tongue (So.)	28	Jacob Cosby-Mosley (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Matthew Dennis (Sr.)	KR	1 Demond Claiborne (Sr.)
P		Rohan MacNeill (Fr.)	PR	8 Carlos Hernandez (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 ACC)

Aug. 29	North Carolina A&T	W	45-13
Sept. 7	Virginia	L	30-31
Sept. 14	Ole Miss	L	6-40
Sept. 28	Louisiana	L	38-41
Oct. 5	at NC State	W	34-30
Oct. 12	Clemson	L	14-49
Oct. 19	at UConn	W	23-20
Oct. 26	at Stanford	W	27-24
Nov. 8	Cal	L	36-46
Nov. 16	at North Carolina	L	24-31
Nov. 23	at Miami (Fla.)	L	14-42
Nov. 30	Duke	L	17-23

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Kennesaw State
Sept. 6	Western Carolina
Sept. 11	NC State
Sept. 27	Georgia Tech
Oct. 4	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 11	at Oregon State
Oct. 25	SMU
Nov. 1	at Florida State
Nov. 8	at Virginia
Nov. 15	North Carolina
Nov. 22	Delaware
Nov. 29	at Duke

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	William Saba, OT	★★★
2.	Freddie Gillens, CB	★★★
3.	Aidan Martin, OT	★★★
4.	Elijah Oehlke, QB	★★★
5.	Jaishaun Offutt, IOL	★★★
6.	Koredell Bartley, WR	★★★
7.	William Wiebush, S	★★★
8.	Kadear Dembele, DL	★★★
9.	Jamar Searcy, RB	★★★
10.	Trishstin Glass, WR	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jake Dickert • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 23-20 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rob Ezell
Defensive Coordinator: Scottie Hazelton • Location: Winston-Salem, N.C. • Stadium: Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium (31,500)

NEVILLE E. GUARD-IMAGN IMAGES

TEE UP YOUR DAY

WITH THE

Athlon Sports' FREE daily golf newsletter is delivered straight to your inbox every morning. A must-read for golf enthusiasts, **MORNING READ** tells you what's happening in pro and recreational golf with a dash of panache.

AAC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	**TULANE**	GREEN WAVE
2	**NAVY**	MIDSHIPMEN
3	**SOUTH FLORIDA**	BULLS
4	**UTSA**	ROADRUNNERS
5	**ARMY**	BLACK KNIGHTS
6	**MEMPHIS**	TIGERS
7	**EAST CAROLINA**	PIRATES
8	**NORTH TEXAS**	MEAN GREEN
9	**FLORIDA ATLANTIC**	OWLS
10	**TEMPLE**	OWLS
11	**CHARLOTTE**	49ERS
12	**UAB**	BLAZERS
13	**RICE**	OWLS
14	**TULSA**	GOLDEN HURRICANE

AAC CHAMPIONSHIP

TULANE OVER NAVY

ALL-AAC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	BLAKE HORVATH	Navy
RB	ROBERT HENRY JR.	UTSA
RB	MAURICE TURNER	Tulane
AP	ELI HEIDENREICH	Navy
WR	ANTHONY SMITH	East Carolina
WR	DEVIN MCCUIN	UTSA
WR	EASTON MESSER	Florida Atlantic
TE	HOUSTON THOMAS	UTSA
C	BRADY SMALL	Army
OL	DERRICK GRAHAM	Tulane
OL	SHADRE HURST	Tulane
OL	PAOLO GENNARELLI	Army
OL	GABE BLAIR	North Texas

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	WILLIAM WHITLOW JR.	Memphis
DL	LANDON ROBINSON	Navy
DL	KAMERON HAMILTON	Tulane
DL	MO WESTMORELAND	Tulane
LB	KALIB FORTNER	Army
LB	SAM HOWARD	Tulane
LB	ANDON THOMAS	Army
LB	MAC HARRIS	South Florida
CB	DE'SHAWN RUCKER	South Florida
CB	DAVID FISHER	North Texas
S	BAILEY DESPANIE	Tulane
S	CASEY LARKIN	Army

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	JONAH DELANGE	UAB
P	LOGAN LUPO	Florida Atlantic
KR	QUINTON JACKSON	Rice
PR	TYSON THOMPSON	Rice

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Frisco: North Texas vs. Old Dominion

Boca Raton: Memphis vs. James Madison

Cure: Tulane vs. Toledo

68 Ventures: East Carolina vs. South Alabama

Birmingham: South Florida vs. Arkansas

Armed Forces: UTSA vs. Air Force

Fenway: Army vs. NC State

Military: Navy vs. North Carolina

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVEN LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

CHARLOTTE
Offense: New: Todd Fitch
Old: Mike Miller
Defense: New: Nate Faanes, Kurt Mattix
Old: Ryan Osborn

EAST CAROLINA
Defense: New: Josh Aldridge
Old: Blake Harrell

FLORIDA ATLANTIC
Offense: New: Zach Kittley
Old: Charlie Frye
Defense: New: Brett Dewhurst
Old: Roc Bellatoni, Brandon Harris

NORTH TEXAS
Defense: New: Skyler Cassity
Old: Brian Odom (interim)

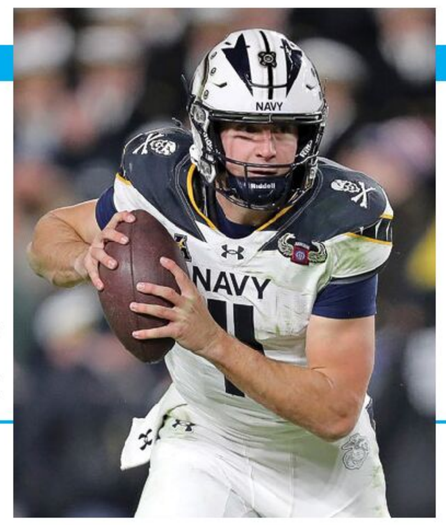
RICE
Offense: New: Vince Munch
Old: Marques Tuiasosopo
Defense: New: Jon Kay
Old: Brian Smith

TEMPLE
Offense: New: Tyler Walker
Old: Danny Langsdorf
Defense: New: Brian Smith
Old: Everett Withers

TULSA
Offense: New: Ty Darlington, Brad Robbins
Old: Steve Spurrier Jr.
Defense: New: Mike Gray, Josh Reardon
Old: Chris Polizzi

UAB
Defense: New: Steve Russ
Old: Sione Ta'ufo'ou

TODD FITCH, CHARLOTTE



BLAKE HORVATH, NAVY
EASTON MESSER, FLORIDA ATLANTIC

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Caden Veltkamp	QB	Florida Atlantic	WKU
	A one-year starter for WKU, Veltkamp gives the Owls an answer under center.			
2.	Maurice Westmoreland	DL	Tulane	UTEP
	With 15 career sacks, Westmoreland strengthens the Green Wave pass rush.			
3.	Easton Messer	WR	Florida Atlantic	WKU
	Messer followed his former quarterback to Boca, so there's already familiarity there.			
4.	Maurice Turner	RB	Tulane	Louisville
	Turner brings depth to the Green Wave backfield after Hughes' departure.			
5.	Santana Hopper	DL	Tulane	Appalachian State
	Adding the Mountaineers' leading sack-getter rounds out Jon Sumrall's defense.			
6.	Reese Poffenbarger	QB	North Texas	Miami (Fla.)
	Poffenbarger, a standout in the FCS, should shine in Eric Morris' QB-friendly offense.			
7.	Shay Taylor	LB	Charlotte	Ohio
	Coming off a career year, the well-traveled Taylor followed Tim Albin to his next stop.			
8.	David Fisher	CB	North Texas	Sam Houston
	Fisher brings 28 starts to a Mean Green secondary that struggled a season ago.			
9.	Brendon Lewis	QB	Memphis	Nevada
	Lewis replaces Seth Henigan, the Tigers' all-time leading passer.			
10.	Shad Banks	LB	UTSA	TCU
	After an injury-plagued season, Banks joins a revamped Roadrunners' defense.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Memphis (61)
2. USF (68)
3. Tulane (75)
4. East Carolina (79)
5. Florida Atlantic (84)
6. Rice (104)
7. UTSA (110)
8. Tulsa (113)
9. Army (120)
10. Navy (125)
11. North Texas (131)
12. Temple (133)
13. UAB (134)
14. Charlotte (135)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 28	East Carolina at NC State
Aug. 30	Boise State at South Florida
Sept. 6	Houston at Rice
Sept. 13	Duke at Tulane
Oct. 18	Army at Tulane
Oct. 25	South Florida at Memphis
Oct. 30	Tulane at UTSA
Nov. 7	Tulane at Memphis
Nov. 15	South Florida at Navy
Nov. 27	Navy at Memphis
Nov. 28	Army at UTSA
Dec. 13	Army vs. Navy (Baltimore)

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	AJ Hill	QB	Memphis	★★★★	231
2.	Shannon Blair	CB	Memphis	★★★	23*
3.	Xavier Johnson	WR	Memphis	★★★	506
4.	Bryce Anderson	TE	Memphis	★★★	28*
5.	Joshua Lewis	EDGE	Tulane	★★★	590
6.	Michael Igbinoghene	CB	Tulane	★★★	677
7.	Eddie Love Jr.	RB	East Carolina	★★★	688
8.	Warren Roberts Jr.	EDGE	Tulane	★★★	732
9.	Aaron Mattingly	TE	UAB	★★★	742
10.	Antwaun Parham	WR	Tulane	★★★	761

*Rankings per On3 industry ranking; *Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

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ARMY BLACK KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 64 | AAC PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 12-2, 8-0 AAC

OFFENSE Life without American Athletic Conference Offensive Player of the Year Bryson Daily and 1,100-yard rusher Kanye Udoh begins in 2025. Daily, who finished sixth in the Heisman Trophy voting, set the single-season FBS record for quarterbacks with 32 rushing touchdowns, while Udoh transferred to Arizona State. Senior Dewayne Coleman, who led Army to victory over Air Force in his first career start for the injured Daily, should get the first crack at quarterback.

The Black Knights led the nation in rushing last season (300.5 ypg). Will Army's flexbone base and the genius of offensive coordinator Cody Worley be enough to maintain the Black Knights' rushing standard? Senior fullback Hayden Reed should be the focal point. Reed recorded his second 100-yard rushing game in Army's Independence Bowl win over Louisiana Tech. Senior slotback Noah Short is Army's top returning rusher (569 yards) and playmaker (five combined TDs last season).

Junior center Brady Small, entering his third season as a starter, and junior guard Paolo Gennarelli are the lone holdovers from a line that was honored with the Joe Moore Award as the best in the country in 2024.

DEFENSE Army will lean on this unit, which returns a lot of experience, as its quarterback situation settles. Junior nose tackle Kody Harris-Miller's active play was key to the Black Knights' national rankings of 16th in rushing defense (112.0 ypg) and eighth in total defense (297.9 ypg). Rush linebacker Elo Modozie's departure via the transfer portal is a blow after he led Army in sacks (6.5), QB hurries (seven) and blocked kicks (two) last season. Senior inside linebackers Kalib Fortner and Andon Thomas are the defense's heartbeat and the team's top two returning tacklers.

The Black Knights secondary picked off 13 of the team's 17 interceptions last season, but both starting cornerbacks entered the transfer portal.

SPECIALISTS Year after year, Army's special teams are among the country's best under coordinator Sean Saturnio. Sophomore Dawson Jones, who made his only extra point last season, is Army's new starting placekicker. Junior punter James Wagenseller needs to be more consistent than his 41.7-yard average last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS If Army answers its questions at quarterback and on the offensive line, the Black Knights can enjoy similar success to last season's 12-2 finish. Army's toughness played out in an 8-0 AAC record last season, and a similar conference schedule can keep that undefeated streak going. Getting the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy after a disappointing loss to Navy is always a top priority.

2024 RESULTS (12-2, 8-0 AAC)

Aug. 30	Lehigh	W	42-7
Sept. 7	at Florida Atlantic	W	24-7
Sept. 21	Rice	W	37-14
Sept. 26	at Temple	W	42-14
Oct. 5	at Tulsa	W	49-7
Oct. 12	UAB	W	44-10
Oct. 19	East Carolina	W	45-28
Nov. 2	Air Force	W	20-3
Nov. 9	at North Texas	W	14-3
Nov. 23	vs. Notre Dame #	L	14-49
Nov. 30	UTSA	W	29-24
Dec. 6	Tulane %	W	35-14
Dec. 14	vs. Navy &	L	13-31
Dec. 28	vs. Louisiana Tech $	W	27-6

#Bronx %AAC Championship
&Landover, MD $Independence Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Tarleton State
Sept. 6	at Kansas State
Sept. 20	North Texas
Sept. 25	at East Carolina
Oct. 4	at UAB
Oct. 11	Charlotte
Oct. 18	at Tulane
Nov. 1	at Air Force
Nov. 8	Temple
Nov. 22	Tulsa
Nov. 28/29	at UTSA
Dec. 13	vs. Navy #

#Baltimore

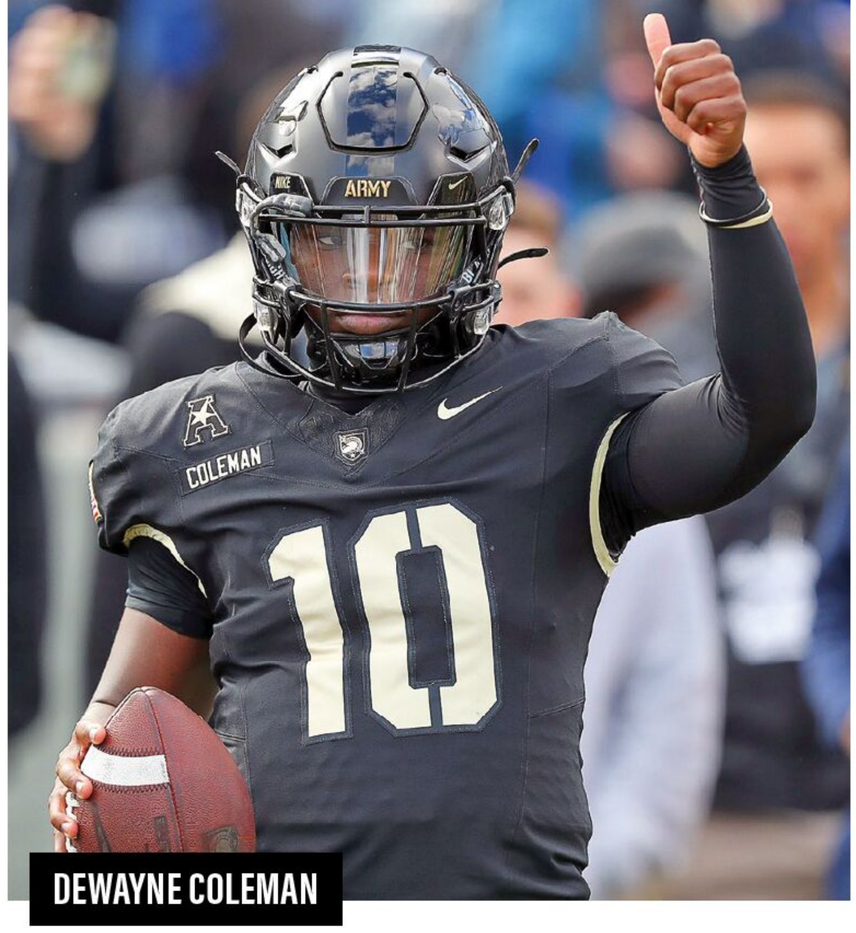
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sam Hayward, EDGE	★★★
2.	Daniel Adefolarin, EDGE	★★★
3.	Jordan Sullivan, IOL	★★★
4.	Jeremy McDowell, IOL	★★★
5.	Zak Stoilov, IOL	★★★
6.	Seth Shigg, QB	★★★
7.	Jaden Pydyn, ATH	★★★
8.	Matthew Perkins, ATH	★★★
9.	Zachary Green, DL	★★★
10.	Joe Callerame, WR	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Monken • Record at School: 82-57 (11 years)
Career Record: 120-73 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Cody Worley
Defensive Coordinator: Nate Woody • Location: West Point N.Y.
Stadium: Michie Stadium (30,000)



DEWAYNE COLEMAN

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN KNIGHTS

They're going to struggle to follow-up last season. [Bryson] Daily is gone, [Kanye] Udoh transferred out and [O-line coach Matt] Drinkall is at Central Michigan. He was a big part of their offensive staff. ... [Jeff] Monken really thrives in low-expectation seasons, and they've got a ton of work to get the offensive side going. Defensively, they're still very good, but that side benefits tremendously from the ball-control approach working for them. If the offensive line can't be rebuilt and they can't eat clock, expect the defense to look a lot worse statistically. ... Right now, this roster is not as talented as Navy, but the program is as solid as ever. This might be more of a transition season while they figure out a quarterback."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	4	**LIAM FORTNER (SR.)**	81	Tobi Olawole (Jr.)
LT	58	Henry Appleton (Jr.)	78	Xavier Archawski (So.)
LG	59	Will Jeffcoat (Sr.)	50	Braden Bartosh (Sr.)
C	51	**BRADY SMALL (JR.)**	75	Kyle Kloska (Jr.)
RG	71	**PAOLO GENNARELLI (JR.)**	72	Lane Parks (Jr.)
RT	74	Teddy Williams (Jr.)	56	Tyler Lee (Jr.)
TE	44	Parker Poloskey (Jr.)	80	Brian Dyer (Jr.)
QB	10	Dewayne Coleman (Sr.)	9	Ethan Washington (So.)
SB	15	**NOAH SHORT (SR.)**	26	David Clerk (Jr.)
SB	27	Samari Howard (Jr.)	43	Brady Mott (Jr.)
FB	8	Hayden Reed (Sr.)	33	Jake Rendina (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	92	**JACK LATORE (SR.)**	99	Jack Bousum (So.)
NT	52	**KODY HARRIS-MILLER (JR.)**	62	Jacob Tuioti (Sr.)
DE	98	Deshontez Gray (Sr.)	94	Javon Smith (So.)
OLB	40	Eric Ford (Sr.)	49	Christian Yousefzadeh (Jr.)
ILB	53	**KALIB FORTNER (SR.)**	21	Baylor Newsom (Jr.)
ILB	51	**ANDON THOMAS (SR.)**	47	Noah Nixon (Jr.)
APACHE	10	Cole Searight (So.)	19	CJ Martin (So.)
CB	5	Justin Weaver (Sr.)	9	Rob Houston (So.)
CB	13	Jabril Williams (Sr.)	17	Jaxon Hammond (Jr.)
S	20	**CASEY LARKIN (SR.)**	3	Steve Nnadozie (Jr.)
S	14	Gavin Shields (Sr.)	30	Collin Matteson (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Dawson Jones (So.)	KR	23	Tre Benson (Sr.)
P	47	James Wagenseller (Jr.)	PR	5	Justin Weaver (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

REID WILLIFORD

DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES)

SCOUTING THE 49ERS

"[Tim] Albin's hire showed a stronger commitment to the program because they were able to bring in a solid staff, but they still lag behind most schools when it comes to resources and spending. To have two very different guys in [Will] Healy and Biff [Poggi] both end up failing; in a region with so much talent for a G5 program, this is a program problem, not a coaching problem. ... They will start a majority of portal players on both sides. It's gonna be more QB run and spread option on offense and a 4-2-5 on defense. ... They're spending a bunch of money to improve their stadium when it's pretty obvious they need to go all-in on spending for NIL and coaching. Albin is a solid coach who kept Ohio really consistent, but this program is too far behind right now."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)					
WR	14	Adam Hopkins IV (So.)	7	E. Jai Mason (Sr.)
WR	88	Miles Burris (So.)	4	Justin Olson (Sr.)
WR	2	Jaylen Hampton (Fr.)	3	Jayden McGowan (Sr.)
LT	74	Tyler Gibson (Jr.)	73	Umar Rockhead (Fr.)
LG	55	Mo Clipper Jr. (Jr.)	67	Dom Silvia (Fr.)
C	**52**	**JONNY KING (SR.)**	76	Isaiah Bullerdick (Jr.)
RG	58	Devin Davis (Jr.)	67	Dom Silvia (Fr.)
RT	57	Mason Bowers (Sr.)	71	Eli Samples (Jr.)
TE	0	Joey Bearns III (Sr.)	87	Jake Young (Jr.)
QB	12	Grayson Loftis (So.)	15	Conner Harrell (Jr.)
RB	5	Don Chaney Jr. (Sr.)	21	Henry Rutledge (Sr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	44	Braden Mullen (Sr.)	7	DJ Burgess (Jr.)
DT	97	Jalar Holley (Sr.)	10	Jorel Liverpool (Sr.)
DT	56	Taz Williams (Sr.)	98	Jefferson Lambert (Jr.)
OLB	26	Xavier Simmons (Jr.)	30	Stellan Bowman (So.)
ILB	**40**	**REID WILLIFORD (SR.)**	36	Parker Startz (Fr.)
ILB	30	Stellan Bowman (So.)	42	Jonathon Okate (Jr.)
HUSKY	12	CJ Clinkscales (Jr.)	3	Colin Gill (So.)
CB	11	Dwight Bootle II (Jr.)	1	Caleb Curtain (Sr.)
CB	5	Antonio Cotman Jr. (So.)	8	Derrick Edwards (Sr.)
S	6	Ja'Qurious Conley (Sr.)	43	Randy Franklin (Sr.)
S	9	Cary Grant (Jr.)	21	Breon Noel (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	95	Bronson Long (Jr.)	KR	21	Henry Rutledge (Sr.)
P	92	Andrew Bennett (Fr.)	PR	3	Jayden McGowan (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

CHARLOTTE 49ERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 124 | AAC PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE Returning just a single starter from 2024 — center Jonny King — the Charlotte 49ers' offense will be chock full of new faces in Tim Albin's first season as head coach. Following a quarterback carousel in both seasons under former head coach Biff Poggi, Albin brought in a trio of transfers — Grayson Loftis (Duke), Conner Harrell (North Carolina) and Zach Wilcke (NW Mississippi Community College/Southern Miss) to battle for the starting job.

With new faces at nearly every position, the offense will be a work in progress. The offensive line and receiver room are inexperienced; the latter lost more than 90% of its production from 2024.

DEFENSE The defense returns a handful of contributors from last season, including inside linebacker Reid Williford, last season's leading tackler with 77.

Safety Ja'Qurious Conley, who transferred from North Carolina in 2024, returns and is the most talented player on the roster. Conley has emerged as the leader of the defense, which will feature a new duo of transfer edge rushers in Braden Mullen (FCS Dartmouth) and DJ Burgess (NW Mississippi CC).

With a few key returners, some new faces via the portal and an experienced defensive staff led by coordinator Nate Faanes, the 49ers' defense is poised to improve on last season's struggles.

SPECIALISTS Replacing their kicker, punter and long-snapper from 2024, the 49ers are fielding battles at all three positions through fall camp. Long-snapper Colby Garfield did play for the 49ers under former head coach Will Healy before transferring to Ohio — where Albin was head coach — for the past three seasons. Electrifying kickoff returner Henry Rutledge ranked 11th in the FBS for combined return yardage in 2023.

Albin has repeatedly said that he hopes to end every drive with a kick, and replacing Stephen Rusnak (11-of-11 on field-goal attempts in 2024) will be key in Year 1.

FINAL ANALYSIS With a tough schedule featuring in-state opponents Appalachian State, North Carolina and East Carolina, as well as road trips to face Georgia, Tulane and Army, the 49ers have an uphill climb to qualify for a bowl for the first time since 2019. The top priorities are to find their quarterback of the future, build the offensive and defensive line in the portal and take the next step in recruiting their backyard and the Carolinas. In his first season at Ohio, Albin won only three games, but he laid the foundation for three consecutive 10-win seasons, featuring two MAC Coach of the Year awards and a conference championship.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 AAC)

Aug. 31	James Madison	L	7-30
Sept. 7	at North Carolina	L	20-38
Sept. 14	Gardner-Webb	W	27-26
Sept. 21	at Indiana	L	14-52
Sept. 28	at Rice	W	21-20
Oct. 5	East Carolina	W	55-24
Oct. 19	at Navy	L	17-51
Oct. 26	at Memphis	L	28-33
Oct. 31	Tulane	L	3-34
Nov. 16	South Florida	L	24-59
Nov. 23	at Florida Atlantic	W	39-27
Nov. 30	UAB	W	29-27

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	App State #
Sept. 6	North Carolina
Sept. 13	Monmouth
Sept. 18	Rice
Oct. 3	at South Florida
Oct. 11	at Army
Oct. 18	Temple
Oct. 24	North Texas
Nov. 8	at East Carolina
Nov. 15	UTSA
Nov. 22	at Georgia
Nov. 29	at Tulane

#Bank of America Stadium

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	DJ Burgess, DL	★★★
2.	Jeremiah Hoffman, WR	★★★
3.	Isaac Sikes-Rasby, IOL	★★★
4.	Jaylen Doss, DL	★★★
5.	Devon St. Clair, S	★★★
6.	Jaylon Johnson, DL	★★★
7.	Omarion Davis, IOL	★★★
8.	Devin Davis, IOL	★★★
9.	Dy'Lon Womack, CB	★★★
10.	KD Gibson, WR	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Albin • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 58-27 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Todd Fitch
Defensive Coordinator: Nate Faanes • Location: Charlotte, N.C. • Stadium: Jerry Richardson Stadium (15,314)

EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 87 | AAC PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 AAC

OFFENSE The return of QB Katin Houser puts the Pirates on the offensive and gives them a reliable triggerman. Hauser completed 61% of his passes for 2,006 yards and 18 touchdowns in coordinator John David Baker's balanced attack. ECU racked up 264.0 yards per game by air and 172.4 over land and ranked 24th in the FBS in total offense (436.4 ypg) and third-down conversion rate (.451) in Baker's first season calling the shots.

There's also the annual treasure chest of wide receivers on board. Keep an eye on speedy Oklahoma transfer Jaquaize Pettaway. He'll be the blur out of the slot and a great complement to breakout star Anthony Smith and future stud Yannick Smith.

Emmanuel Poku and Jimarion McCrimon return up front, where transfers have fortified the line. Marlon Gunn Jr. was healthy this spring and could be ready to replicate his 5.1 yards per carry as a freshman. Houston transfer Parker Jenkins and London Montgomery can help.

DEFENSE The difference for ECU in its 5-1 finish? When Blake Harrell bumped up to the head coach's office, the defensive mastermind doubled down on an opportunistic unit that created 22 takeaways and ranked 13th in the nation in red zone defense and 14th in tackles for a loss per game.

Nine starters are gone — many escaping through the portal — but don't bet against Harrell and coordinator Josh Aldridge. They'll rebuild the front around lone returning starter Ryheem Craig and veterans Jasiyah Robinson and Zion Wilson. Aldridge has so many packages and varying fronts that the defense looked unsettled in the spring. Coaches were giving youngsters chances at different spots and in new looks. Linebackers Samuel Dankah and Jackson Barker could be beneficiaries, but Dameon Wilson will have an impact in his second season in Greenville.

Standout Ja'Marley Riddle and Teagan Wilk, who returns from a year at Houston, anchor a young secondary. Decorated FCS Western Carolina transfer corner Jordy Lowery impressed this offseason.

SPECIALISTS Noah Perez and Andrew Conrad are waging a duel for the placekicking job; Perez has the edge after a strong finish in 2024. The punter will be new, but the Pirates possess speed and depth in the return game and coverage units and were among the nation's leaders in blocked kicks.

FINAL ANALYSIS Harrell is establishing a culture that looks sustainable in the new college landscape. The Pirates have been plundered in the portal, but they reclaimed a couple of their own — Wilk and DL Xavier McIver — and they added other impact players, notably Pettaway and Lowery. It won't be easy against a schedule that includes seven bowl teams from a year ago and statement games with NC State, BYU, Army and Memphis.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 AAC)

Aug. 31	Norfolk State	W	42-3
Sept. 7	at Old Dominion	W	20-14
Sept. 14	Appalachian State	L	19-21
Sept. 21	at Liberty	L	24-35
Sept. 28	UTSA	W	30-20
Oct. 5	at Charlotte	L	24-55
Oct. 19	at Army	L	28-45
Oct. 26	Temple	W	56-34
Nov. 7	Florida Atlantic	W	49-14
Nov. 14	at Tulsa	W	38-31
Nov. 23	at North Texas	W	40-28
Nov. 29	Navy	L	20-34
Dec. 28	vs. NC State #	W	26-21

#Military Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at NC State
Sept. 6	Campbell
Sept. 13	at Coastal Carolina
Sept. 20	BYU
Sept. 25	Army
Oct. 9	at Tulane
Oct. 16	Tulsa
Nov. 1	at Temple
Nov. 8	Charlotte
Nov. 15	Memphis
Nov. 22	at UTSA
Nov. 29	at Florida Atlantic

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jonathan Williams, WR	★★★★
2.	Eddie Love Jr., RB	★★★
3.	Derrion Horsley, CB	★★★
4.	Tavius Horne Jr., CB	★★★
5.	Angelo Ross, CB	★★★
6.	Dylon Worthen, EDGE	★★★
7.	Josiah Dwyer, DL	★★★
8.	Durante Speer, S	★★★
9.	Jordan David Miles, LB	★★★
10.	Stephen Collier, TE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Blake Harrell • Record at School: 5-1 (1 year)
Career Record: 5-1 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: John David Baker
Defensive Coordinator: Josh Aldridge • Location: Greenville, N.C.
Stadium: Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium (51,000)

KATIN HOUSER

SCOUTING THE PIRATES

"The thinking around keeping an interim has changed a lot in the portal era. The turnaround under [Blake] Harrell in the back end of the season was hard to ignore, but keeping him on also saved the school money and kept their roster from flipping. ... [DC Josh] Aldridge called a lot of really aggressive stuff at Liberty; it will be interesting to see how they mesh together. ... They kept the OC [John David Baker] because, honestly, the scheme wasn't the problem. They looked more balanced after Harrell came in. ... Recruiting looks really good for them, and it should be in this part of the Carolinas. This should be a better program than it's been. If they continue winning like they did after firing [Mike] Houston, it was very clearly a culture issue. This was always a talented program."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	9	**ANTHONY SMITH (SR.)**	13	Tyler Johnson (So.)
WR	12	Jaquaize Pettaway (Jr.)	19	Payton Mangrum (Sr.)
WR	15	Yannick Smith (So.)	3	Kelan Robinson (Sr.)
LT	71	Bryce Weaver (Jr.)	61	Jayson Tarpeh (Sr.)
LG	69	**EMMANUEL POKU (JR.)**	75	Kyle Long (Sr.)
C	53	Panda Askew (Sr.)	71	Bryce Weaver (Jr.)
RG	55	Darius Bell (Sr.)	56	Leivi Semaia (Jr.)
RT	62	**JIMARION MCCRIMON (JR.)**	77	Cooper Trnavsky (Sr.)
TE	6	Desirrio Riles (Jr.)	8	Jayvontay Conner (So.)
QB	4	**KATIN HOUSER (JR.)**	2	Raheim Jeter (So.)
RB	21	Marlon Gunn Jr. (Sr.)	24	Parker Jenkins (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	55	Jasiyah Robinson (Sr.)	9	J.D. Lampley (Sr.)
NT	54	Zion Wilson (Sr.)	52	Xavier McIver (Sr.)
DT	44	Preston Carr (Jr.)	93	Rion Roseborough (So.)
DE	5	**RYHEEM CRAIG (SR.)**	50	Kieran Davis (Jr.)
SLB	42	Julien Davis (Jr.)	33	Luke Holmes (So.)
MLB	23	Dameon Wilson (Sr.)	6	Jackson Barker (Jr.)
WLB	7	Samuel Dankah (Sr.)	11	DJ Johnson Jr. (So.)
CB	15	Jordy Lowery (Jr.)	21	Jonathan Akins (So.)
CB	24	TyMir Brown (Sr.)	14	Key Crowell (So.)
S	3	Teagan Wilk (Sr.)	12	Kevon Merrell (So.)
S	2	**JA'MARLEY RIDDLE (SO.)**	19	DeMarius Hines (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	43	Noah Perez (Sr.)	KR	10	Brock Spalding (Jr.)
P	48	Tomas O'Halloran (Fr.)	PR	12	Jaquaize Pettaway (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

LUCAS BOLAND-IMAGN IMAGES

GEMARI SANDS

JEFF ROMANCE

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"No one was surprised when [Tom] Herman was let go. His reputation was growing as a difficult guy to work with, and when those personalities lose enough games, they're gone quick. ... This is another first-year, roster flip, heavy portal team, but the difference is that [Zach] Kittley and [QB Kaden] Veltkamp have a working relationship. You'll see a more experienced offense immediately, and it should be a big improvement over the last few seasons at quarterback. ... It's a really young staff, and the head coach is going to call plays for a bunch of transfers, so honestly this thing could go in any direction. They'll be interesting to watch."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	82	Jabari Smith (So.)	19	Dominique Henry (Jr.)
WR	8	Easton Messer (Jr.)	11	Asaad Waseem (So.)
WR	7	JR Wilson Jr. (Sr.)	80	Joseph Young (Jr.)
LT	57	Ja'Kavion Nonar (Jr.)	77	Keon Rohé (Fr.)
LG	66	Scarlee Jean (Sr.)	69	Madden Sanker (So.)
C	65	Braden Cunningham (Fr.)	69	Madden Sanker (So.)
RG	**73**	**ALEX ATCAVAGE (SR.)**	62	Okino King (Jr.)
RT	78	Daughtry Richardson (Jr.)	75	Mauricio Hinds (Fr.)
TE	6	Reid Mikeska (So.)	13	Martavious Collins (Fr.)
QB	10	Caden Veltkamp (Jr.)	12	Kasen Weisman (So.)
RB	13	Gemari Sands (So.)	25	Xavier Terrell (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	93	Eric Brantley Jr. (So.)	14	Tycoolhill Luman (Fr.)
DT	10	CJ Doggette (Jr.)	62	Enyce Sledge (Jr.)
DT	7	Bryce Langston (Sr.)	9	Naejaun Barber (Sr.)
DE	2	Wilky Denaud (So.)	51	Chenellson Exume (Fr.)
OLB	6	Leon Hart Jr. (Sr.)	24	Robert Lee (Fr.)
MLB	44	Tyler Stolsky (Jr.)	17	Char'quez Lee (Fr.)
OLB	28	Zyere Horton (Jr.)	35	Tito Nunez (Fr.)
CB	12	Cameron Goggins (So.)	22	Lawrence Johnson (So.)
CB	3	Derrick Rogers (So.)	18	Zion Paret (Fr.)
S	29	Kyle Boylston (Fr.)	33	Michael Cates (Jr.)
S	25	Mike Wright III (So.)	33	Michael Cates (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Garrison Smith (Sr.)	KR	82 Jabari Smith (So.)
P	19	Logan Lupo (Sr.)	PR	8 Easton Messer (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 107 | AAC PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 AAC

OFFENSE First-year head coach Zach Kittley didn't hesitate to pluck redshirt junior quarterback Caden Veltkamp from the transfer portal to lead his version of the Air Raid offense. In 2024, Veltkamp threw for 3,108 yards and 25 TDs at WKU, where Kittley helped recruit him. With much of Kittley's offensive verbiage remaining the same, Veltkamp displayed early command of Florida Atlantic's offense during spring ball.

It helped that one of Veltkamp's favorite targets also made the move to Boca Raton. Easton Messer averaged 14.4 yards on his 55 catches last season at WKU. The duo will head an offense that wants to play ultra-up-tempo to wear out defenses and force mistakes.

At 6-foot-4, Virginia transfer JR Wilson Jr. is a big-bodied wide receiver who will be counted on to extend drives. Asaad Waseem and Jabari Smith are shifty pass-catchers who can make tacklers miss.

Gemari Sands carried the ball only 31 times last season, but Kittley says he "burst on the scene" this spring.

Redshirt freshman center Braden Cunningham's development may be the key for the offensive line. Returners Alex Atcavage and Daughtry Richardson provide stability on the right side of the line.

DEFENSE Kittley's Owls will try to confuse opposing offenses with different schemes, often switching between three- and four-man fronts. Kittley praises defensive tackles Bryce Langston and CJ Doggette for creating push at the line on running and passing plays. The problem facing coordinator Brett Dewhurst is the lack of experience, as the Owls don't have a single returning starter on that side of the ball.

End Eric Brantley Jr. launches with an explosive first step off the edge. He should prove disruptive in third-and-long situations. Minnesota transfer Tyler Stolsky mastered FAU's defensive scheme quickly at middle linebacker.

Redshirt freshman safety Kyle Boylston, a center fielder on the Owls baseball team, might be the most athletically gifted player on the team.

SPECIALISTS Logan Lupo can handle both punting and kicking duties but will likely begin the season as the kicker only. Surehanded Messer will return punts and could factor in kickoff return plans as well.

FINAL ANALYSIS FAU's spring roster featured 19 first-year transfers, and that number will almost certainly rise. Kittley's offenses have been entertaining, and there's no reason to expect differently this year. Defensively, line play will determine FAU's success. If the front can control the line of scrimmage, FAU should at least find itself playing competitive games in an American Athletic Conference that lacks dominant teams.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 AAC)

Aug. 30	at Michigan State	L	10-16
Sept. 7	Army	L	7-24
Sept. 14	FIU	W	38-20
Sept. 21	at UConn	L	14-48
Sept. 28	Wagner	W	41-10
Oct. 12	North Texas	L	37-41
Oct. 19	at UTSA	L	24-38
Nov. 1	South Florida	L	21-44
Nov. 7	at East Carolina	L	14-49
Nov. 16	at Temple (ot)	L	15-18
Nov. 23	Charlotte	L	27-39
Nov. 30	at Tulsa	W	63-16

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Maryland
Sept. 6	Florida A&M
Sept. 13	at FIU
Sept. 27	Memphis
Oct. 4	at Rice
Oct. 11	UAB
Oct. 18	at South Florida
Oct. 25	at Navy
Nov. 8	Tulsa
Nov. 15	at Tulane
Nov. 22	UConn
Nov. 29	East Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jade Card, ATH	★★★
2.	Cameron Gooden, EDGE	★★★
3.	Tamez Young, TE	★★★
4.	Mykel Calixte, WR	★★★
5.	Branden Hoch, WR	★★★
6.	Ethan Ervin, RB	★★★
7.	Landon Rapkiewicz, IOL	★★★
8.	Hector Chavez, LB	★★★
9.	Josh Roberts, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jordan Magwood, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Zach Kittley • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Zach Kittley
Defensive Coordinator: Brett Dewhurst • Location: Boca Raton, Fla. • Stadium: Flagler Credit Union Stadium (30,000)

MEMPHIS TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 65 | AAC PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 11-2, 6-2 AAC

OFFENSE Nevada transfer Brendon Lewis is the leading candidate to start at quarterback for the Tigers. Lewis, who began his career at Colorado, is a dual-threat signal-caller and has started 36 games the past two seasons. His chief competition likely will come from redshirt freshman Arrington Maiden and true freshman AJ Hill.

Sutton Smith returns at running back after having a potential breakout season ended as soon as it began. Smith suffered a knee injury in the first quarter of the season opener against FCS North Alabama and missed the remainder of the year. His absence accelerated Greg Desrosiers Jr.'s development into a productive back and a dependable receiver.

The Tigers will rely on a number of first-year receivers to assist an inexperienced group of returnees. Transfers CJ Smith (Purdue), Ger-Cari Caldwell (FCS North Carolina A&T) and Jadon Thompson (Louisville) will help offset the loss of nearly 90% of the Tigers' receiving yards.

The return of senior left tackle Chris Adams and right guard Malachi Breland will bolster the offensive line.

DEFENSE Heavy losses at linebacker led to major transfer portal additions. Among the Tigers' top newcomers: Everett Roussaw Jr., who comes over from conference rival UAB, where he posted 75 tackles and three sacks in 2024; and Drue Watts, a Nevada addition who had 65 tackles a year ago.

End William Whitlow Jr., the lone returning starter from last year's season-opening game, will anchor the defensive front. An All-AAC performer, Whitlow entered the transfer portal after the season and drew interest from Oklahoma and Penn State, but he decided to return.

Kourtlan Marsh returns to lead the secondary. Marsh, a safety, suffered a wrist injury before the season started and didn't play until the final four games, a stretch in which he excelled. He was named AAC Defensive Player of the Week for his role in a showdown against Tulane, forcing two fumbles, recovering one and breaking up a pass.

SPECIALISTS Newcomer Gianni Spetic will be the Tigers' kicker after transferring in from Ohio, where he made 13-of-16 field goals last season. Desrosiers is slated to return kickoffs, and newcomer Thompson is expected to be the team's punt return option.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Memphis football program is on an unprecedented roll that began slightly more than a decade ago. How fast new quarterback Lewis grasps the offense — and how quickly a revamped defense acclimates to coordinator Jordon Hankins — will determine whether the Tigers add to their streak of 11 straight bowl games, a run matched only by Alabama, Clemson, Georgia, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Iowa.

2024 RESULTS (11-2, 6-2 AAC)

Aug. 31	North Alabama	W	40-0
Sept. 7	Troy	W	38-17
Sept. 14	at Florida State	W	20-12
Sept. 21	at Navy	L	44-56
Sept. 28	Middle Tennessee	W	24-7
Oct. 12	at South Florida	W	21-3
Oct. 19	North Texas	W	52-44
Oct. 26	Charlotte	W	33-28
Nov. 2	at UTSA	L	36-44
Nov. 8	Rice	W	27-20
Nov. 16	UAB	W	53-18
Nov. 28	at Tulane	W	34-24
Dec. 17	vs. West Virginia #	W	42-37

#Frisco Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Chattanooga
Sept. 6	at Georgia State
Sept. 13	at Troy
Sept. 20	Arkansas
Sept. 27	at Florida Atlantic
Oct. 4	Tulsa
Oct. 18	at UAB
Oct. 25	South Florida
Oct. 31	at Rice
Nov. 7	Tulane
Nov. 15	at East Carolina
Nov. 27	Navy

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Xavier Johnson, WR	★★★★
2.	AJ Hill, QB	★★★
3.	Chance Holloman, OT	★★★
4.	Bryce Anderson, TE	★★★
5.	Shannon Blair, CB	★★★
6.	Ian Williams, S	★★★
7.	Rahim Hutchins Jr., WR	★★★
8.	Xavier Thompson, CB	★★★
9.	Josiah Clemons, OT	★★★
10.	Lamar Fairfax Jr., DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Silverfield • Record at School: 42-21 (5+ years) • Career Record: 42-21 (5+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Cramsey Defensive Coordinator: Jordon Hankins • Location: Memphis, Tenn. Stadium: Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium (50,000)

WILLIAM WHITLOW JR.

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Maybe the most talented roster in this league. They're a quarterback away from winning the league, I think, which is a pretty big position to have questions about. Losing [Seth] Henigan is a huge blow for them, but this is a QB-friendly offense, and they like the athleticism of the Nevada transfer [Brendon Lewis]. ... They focused on offensive line and defense in the portal, but they've done a really solid job keeping high school recruiting going. [Ryan] Silverfield has been really consistent building here; the coordinators are back, and the schemes are the same. ... They're always a game or two short of breaking out as a G5 playoff contender. They have more talent than some P4 programs right now, and they're a legit threat to win the conference."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	12	Brady Kluse (So.)	11	Ger-Cari Caldwell (Sr.)
WR	19	Jamari Hawkins (Jr.)	6	Marcello Bussey (Sr.)
WR	1	CJ Smith (Jr.)	10	Keonde Henry (Fr.)
LT	**61**	**CHRIS ADAMS (SR.)**	77	Parker Peterson (So.)
LG	70	Parker Mitchell (Jr.)	62	Ethan Newman (So.)
C	52	Yakiri Walker (Sr.)		Austin Gentle (Sr.)
RG	**72**	**MALACHI BRELAND (SO.)**	59	Jacob Norcross (So.)
RT	78	Travis Burke (Sr.)	68	Jonathan Young (Jr.)
TE	87	Bryce Anderson (So.)	88	Jerry Cross (Jr.)
QB	2	Brendon Lewis (Sr.)	7	Arrington Maiden (Fr.)
RB	5	Sutton Smith (Jr.)	13	Greg Desrosiers Jr. (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

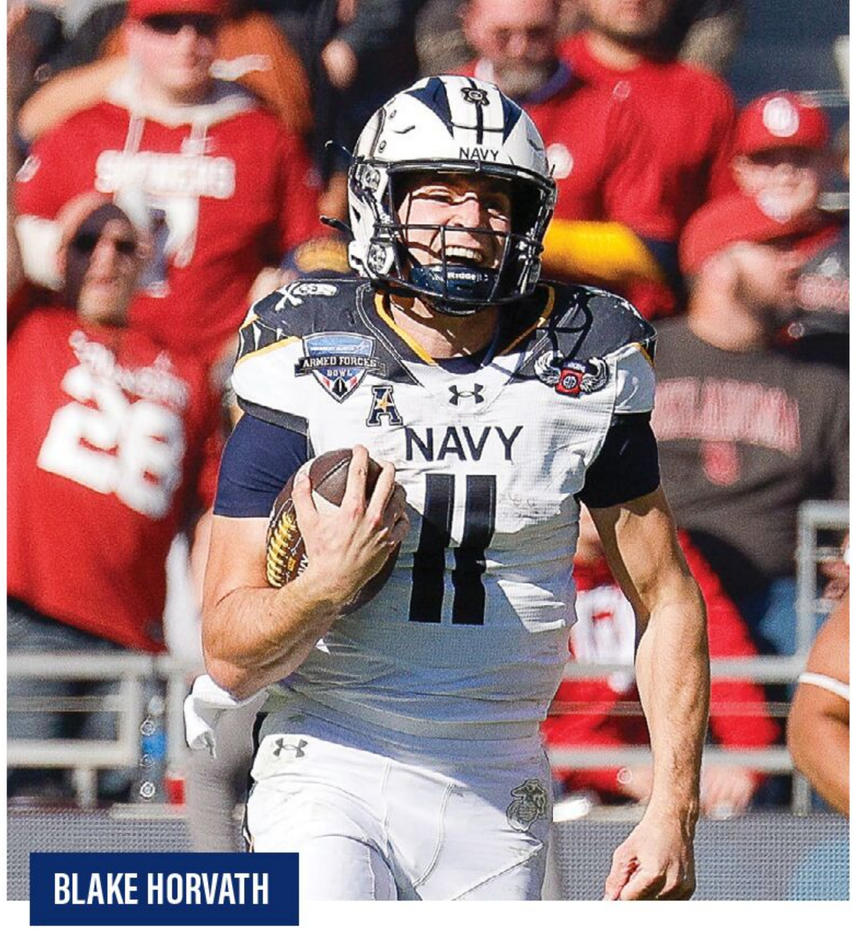
DE	90	Taylor Burton (Jr.)	88	Rayyan Buell (Sr.)
NT	35	Mond Cole (Sr.)	99	Pooda Walker (Sr.)
DE	**9**	**WILLIAM WHITLOW JR. (SR.)**	44	Reggie Grimes (Sr.)
SLB	8	Cam Burden (Sr.)	31	DeMarco Ward (So.)
MLB	3	Sam Brumfield (Sr.)	7	Drue Watts (Sr.)
WLB	6	Everett Roussaw Jr. (Jr.)	48	Jayden Flaker (Sr.)
CB	1	Omarion Cooper (Sr.)	18	Joey Hunter (Sr.)
CB	20	Jaidyn Denis (Sr.)	21	Samson Israel (Jr.)
NB	24	Kamari Wilson (Jr.)	15	Cameron Miller (Jr.)
S	0	Kourtlan Marsh (Sr.)	13	Jeremiah Jordan (Jr.)
S	5	Chris Bracy (So.)	16	Jaylen Thompson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Gianni Spetic (Jr.)	KR	13 Greg Desrosiers Jr. (Sr.)
P	46	Tanner Gillis (Sr.)	PR	4 Jadon Thompson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

CHRIS DAY/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL



BLAKE HORVATH

SCOUTING THE MIDSHIPMEN

"Blake Horvath is on track to be the next great Navy quarterback. As long as he's healthy, he's going to get better and better. ... They returned to form in a big way last season. They haven't been that dangerous on offense in a really long time, and defensively, they were much better coached. ... They have a tremendous advantage in the portal era with their consistency; they're just not going to lose guys like the rest of us. They're bringing back almost the entire offense and half the defense in a league where the most talented programs can't say that. ... A lot of teams in the league can take advantage of matchups in the passing game when you play them. That's an area they could improve on. ... They could definitely have the same kind of season Army did last year."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)				
WR	82	**NATHAN KENT (SR.)**	89	Luke Hutchison (Jr.
LT	73	Sean Crowley (So.)	59	Hansen Collie (So.)
LG	68	**BEN PURVIS (SR.)**	72	Greyson Crawford (Sr.)
C	69	**CAM NICHOLS (JR.)**	70	Jake Polito (So.)
RG	79	Hoke Smith II (Jr.)	66	Jaylin Acevedo (So.)
RT	65	Connor Heater (So.)	60	Zarian Simms (Jr.)
TE	83	**CODY HOWARD (SR.)**	85	Jake Norris (Jr.)
QB	11	**BLAKE HORVATH (SR.)**	5	Braxton Woodson (Jr.)
SB	22	**ELI HEIDENREICH (SR.)**	25	Isaiah Bryant (Jr.)
SB	24	**BRANDON CHATMAN (SR.)**	20	TK Hodges (Jr.)
FB	46	**ALEX TECZA (SR.)**	40	Vic Listorti (Jr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	90	Julien Moutome (So.)	34	Benjamin Franklin (So.)
NG	96	**LANDON ROBINSON (SR.)**	64	Chris Herock (So.)
NT	95	Griffen Willis (Jr.)	98	Kendall Whiteside (Sr.)
OLB	0	Kenneth McShan (Sr.)	14	**JAXSON CAMPBELL (SR.)**
ILB	39	Job Grant (Jr.)	58	Coleman Cauley (Jr.)
ILB	56	MarcAnthony Parker (So.)	53	Marcus Bleazard (Jr.)
OLB	35	**LUKE PIRRIS (SR.)**	57	Dylan Spelios (Sr.)
CB	13	**ANDREW DUHART (SR.)**	3	Irabonoise Oniha (Jr.)
CB	17	Justin Ross (So.)	28	Bryce Allen (Jr.)
SS	16	Giuseppe Sessi (Jr.)	7	Kush'i Abraham (Jr.)
FS	23	Aaron Rose (So.)	1	Seth English (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	17	Nathan Kirkwood (Sr.)	KR 25	Isaiah Bryant (Jr.)
P	11	Jacob Carlson (So.)	PR 22	Eli Heidenreich (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ANDREW DIEB-IMAGN IMAGES

NAVY MIDSHIPMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 49 | AAC PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 AAC

OFFENSE Hiring Drew Cronic as offensive coordinator paid immediate and major dividends last season. Cronic's "millennial" version of the Wing-T revived an anemic attack. Quarterback Blake Horvath was the triggerman as Navy's new offense took the American Athletic Conference by storm, averaging 31.3 points per game. The Midshipmen were explosive, producing 36 offensive plays of 30 yards or more. Cronic's schemes put the ball in the hands of the top playmakers — namely Horvath, fullback Alex Tecza and snipe Eli Heidenreich. All three return this season.

Horvath was sensational from start to finish, leading the team in rushing with 1,246 yards and 17 touchdowns and passing for another 1,353 yards and 13 scores. Tecza totaled 576 rushing yards, 229 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns. Heidenreich was the primary weapon in the passing game with 39 receptions for 671 yards and added 444 rushing yards.

Left guard Ben Purvis and center Cam Nichols, the only returning starters up front, lead an offensive line that must grow up in a hurry.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator P.J. Volker maintained head coach Brian Newberry's high standard in 2024, as Navy ranked 34th nationally in scoring defense (22.2 points per game) and fourth in red-zone defense.

The Mids graduated their top three tacklers in inside linebackers Colin Ramos and Kyle Jacob, along with safety Rayuan Lane. End Justin Reed, who led the team in tackles for a loss and sacks, was another big loss.

Returning nose guard Landon Robinson was an absolute force up front, earning first-team All-American Athletic Conference honors. The 285-pounder is an athletic freak and a definite NFL prospect.

Navy also returns proven performers at tackle (Griffen Willis), outside linebacker (Luke Pirris and Kenneth McShan) and cornerback (Andrew Duhart). The Mids must replace both inside backers and three-fourths of the secondary.

SPECIALISTS Jacob Carlson will replace Riley Riethman, Navy's all-time leader for career and single-season punting average. Carlson has a lot to prove. Nathan Kirkwood was a mediocre kicker (5-of-9 on field goals) and must prove he can be reliable beyond 30 yards. Heidenreich has the potential to be the program's most dangerous punt returner in a long time.

FINAL ANALYSIS All the parts are in place for another winning season with a strong, stable coaching staff and plenty of returning talent. The defense continues to perform at a high level, while the offense is unique and evolving. The early-season schedule is favorable; Navy begins conference play against the six schools that finished at the bottom of the standings.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 AAC)

Aug. 31	Bucknell	W	49-21
Sept. 7	Temple	W	38-11
Sept. 21	Memphis	W	56-44
Sept. 28	at UAB	W	41-18
Oct. 5	at Air Force	W	34-7
Oct. 19	Charlotte	W	51-17
Oct. 26	vs. Notre Dame #	L	14-51
Nov. 2	at Rice	L	10-24
Nov. 9	at South Florida	W	28-7
Nov. 16	Tulane	L	0-35
Nov. 29	at East Carolina	W	34-20
Dec. 14	vs. Army %	W	31-13
Dec. 27	vs. Oklahoma &	W	21-20

#East Rutherford %Landover &Armed Forces Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	VMI
Sept. 6	UAB
Sept. 13	at Tulsa
Sept. 27	Rice
Oct. 4	Air Force
Oct. 11	at Temple
Oct. 25	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 1	at North Texas
Nov. 8	at Notre Dame
Nov. 15	South Florida
Nov. 27	at Memphis
Dec. 13	vs. Army #

#Baltimore,

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sean Martin, S	★★★
2.	Matt McMahon, IOL	★★★
3.	Michael Dove, QB	★★★
4.	John Hebert, IOL	★★★
5.	Merrick Barlow, TE	★★★
6.	Buddy Collins, ATH	★★★
7.	Jack Heath, OT	★★★
8.	Garrison Dibble, EDGE	★★★
9.	Tyon Spiller, ATH	★★★
10.	Zyon McKenzie, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Newberry • Record at School: 15-10 (2 years)
Career Record: 15-10 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Drew Cronic
Defensive Coordinator: P.J. Volker • Location: Annapolis, Md.
Stadium: Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium (34,000)

NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 88 | AAC PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 AAC

OFFENSE Head coach Eric Morris' past two quarterbacks thrived for one season and then transferred to a Power 4 program. He's reloading with Miami (Fla.) transfer Reese Poffenbarger, who was Cam Ward's backup in 2024, and Drew Mestemaker. Poffenbarger passed for almost 6,000 yards at FCS Albany in 2022-23. Mestemaker accounted for 448 yards of total offense in UNT's bowl game. Both are good options to keep the Mean Green on track after ranking third in the country in total offense last season (488.8 ypg), so they'll compete for the job.

However, the leading rusher and top three receivers must be replaced. And the offensive line is rebuilt, so expect a trial-and-error approach early.

Running back Makenzie McGill II (470 rushing yards, 10 TDs last season) should carry a larger load. Speedy sophomore wide receiver Miles Coleman (36 rec., 378 yards) appears headed for a breakout season.

Tight end Tre Williams III was a Division II All-American at Limestone University and perhaps the most intriguing transfer on offense.

DEFENSE This unit needs a reboot after ranking No. 128 nationally in total defense (460.5 ypg). That task goes to new coordinator Skyler Cassity, a 30-year-old rising star who built defenses at FCS Abilene Christian (2022-23) and Sam Houston (2024), and his retooled staff.

More than a half-dozen Sam Houston transfers followed Cassity to UNT. Some will help rebuild the defensive line, while others like linebacker Trey Fields (80 tackles, six tackles for a loss, three fumble recoveries in 2024) could become immediate playmakers. The secondary has returning experience in Evan Jackson (59 tackles, three INTs) and Quinton Hammonds (52 tackles, one INT). But improvement is needed across the board on defense.

SPECIALISTS Special teams have been strong. UNT led the AAC in blocked punts, lowest kickoff return average allowed and lowest punt return average last season. Placekicker Kali Nguma made nine consecutive field goals and finished 11-for-16 on the season. Sawyer Evans averaged 41 yards per punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS UNT hasn't had a winning season since 2018 despite making four bowl games during that time. Morris' tenure has followed that middling trend with 5-7 and 6-7 records in his first two seasons, respectively. Last season, UNT had one of the nation's most productive offenses and among the worst defenses. More balance could equal more wins.

Perhaps UNT finally gets over the hump with a winning season. But it'll face growing pains that point to a slow start and a stronger finish — and likely another record hovering around .500.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 AAC)

Aug. 31	at South Alabama	W	52-38
Sept. 7	Stephen F. Austin	W	35-20
Sept. 14	at Texas Tech	L	21-66
Sept. 21	Wyoming	W	44-17
Sept. 28	Tulsa	W	52-20
Oct. 12	at Florida Atlantic	W	41-37
Oct. 19	at Memphis	L	44-52
Oct. 26	Tulane	L	37-45
Nov. 9	Army	L	3-14
Nov. 15	at UTSA	L	27-48
Nov. 23	East Carolina	L	28-40
Nov. 30	at Temple	W	24-17
Jan. 3	vs. Texas State #	L	28-30

#First Responder Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Lamar
Sept. 6	at W. Michigan
Sept. 13	Washington St.
Sept. 20	at Army
Sept. 27	South Alabama
Oct. 10	South Florida
Oct. 18	UTSA
Oct. 24	at Charlotte
Nov. 1	Navy
Nov. 15	at UAB
Nov. 22	at Rice
Nov. 28/29	Temple

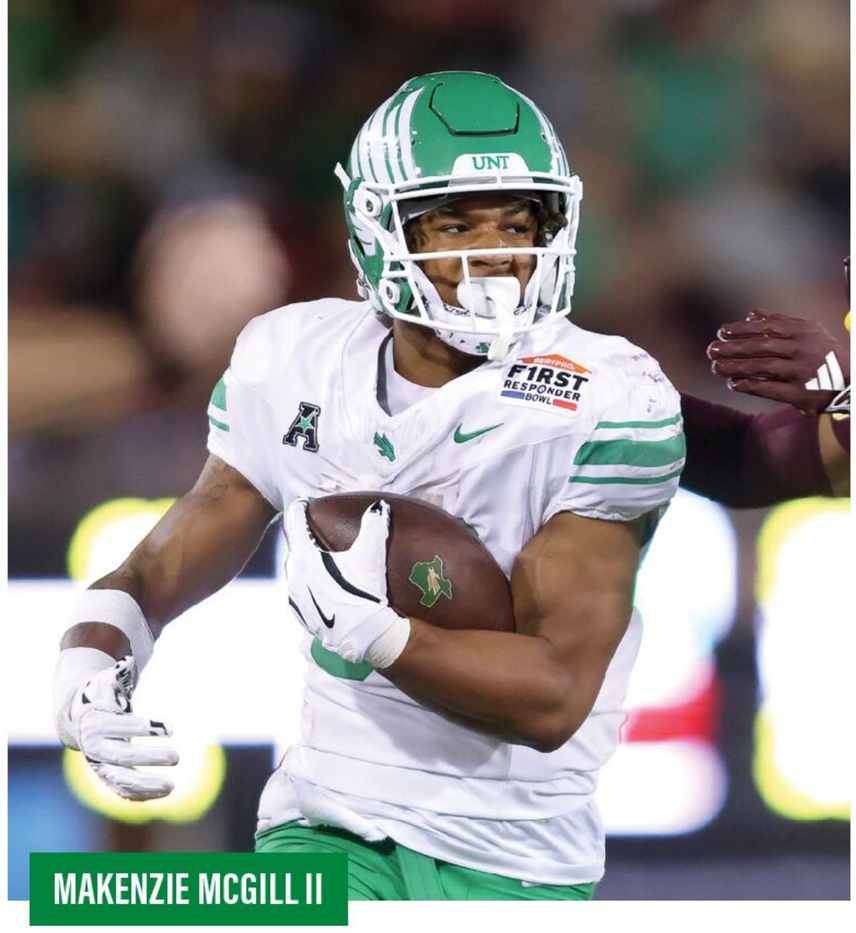
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jordan Reasonover, IOL	★★★
2.	Chris Jimerson Jr., QB	★★★
3.	Terrence Lewis, WR	★★★
4.	Bryce Garza, CB	★★★
5.	Jaden Manning, LB	★★★
6.	Caleb Hawkins, ATH	★★★
7.	Brayden Knox, LB	★★★
8.	Antwon Brown, DL	★★★
9.	Roberto Rodriguez, IOL	★★★
10.	Brenden Reese, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eric Morris • Record at School: 11-14 (2 years)
Career Record: 35-32 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jordan Davis
Defensive Coordinator: Skyler Cassity • Location: Denton, Texas •
Stadium: DATCU Stadium (30,100)



MAKENZIE MCGILL II

SCOUTING THE MEAN GREEN

"This is another program grafting another team onto their roster this season. It's basically the standard Eric Morris Air Raid and the Sam Houston defense. ... The fastest way to get personnel for a new system is to bring over the guys who ran it; that's basically what they're doing with the transition. [DC Skyler] Cassity understands the kind of offenses you see both in the Texas region and the G5, and he turned around Sam Houston really quickly. Can he do it here? There's more of a variety of schemes in this league, and it's a higher level of talent, but anything would be an improvement for these guys. The offense is pretty wash-and-repeat; if the defensive change works, they could be a surprise contender."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	22	Landon Sides (Jr.)	4	Cameron Dorner (Sr.)
WR	**11**	**DALTON CARNES (JR.)**	3	Simeon Evans (Sr.)
WR	1	Miles Coleman (So.)	10	Wyatt Young (So.)
LT	**67**	**BRAYDON NELSON (SO.)**	77	Jaymon Lamb (So.)
LG	71	Ugonna Nnanna (Sr.)	73	Julio Madero IV (So.)
C	**65**	**GABE BLAIR (SR.)**	70	Tay Yanta (Sr.)
RG	54	Johnny Dickson (Jr.)	76	Desmond Magiya (So.)
RT	72	Jimto Obidegwu (Sr.)	74	Larry Moore (Sr.)
TE	6	Tre Williams III (Sr.)	87	Brandon Young Jr. (So.)
QB	7	Reese Poffenbarger (Sr.)	17	Drew Mestemaker (Fr.)
RB	0	Makenzie McGill II (So.)	5	Jayden Becks (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	40	Keviyan Huddleston (So.)	45	Zhaiylen Scott (Fr.)
NT	88	Richard Outland Jr. (Sr.)	94	Jayden Williams (So.)
DT	**15**	**FATAFEHI VAILEA II (SR.)**	48	Jaedon Langley (Fr.)
DE	44	Briceon Hayes (Sr.)	90	Ethan Day (Jr.)
LB	**32**	**ETHAN WESLOSKI (JR.)**	35	JJ Jean-Louis (So.)
LB	6	Trey Fields (Sr.)	53	Blake Fann (So.)
LB	7	Shane Whitter (Sr.)	26	S'Maje Burrell (So.)
CB	1	David Fisher (Sr.)	17	Taylor Starling (So.)
CB	2	Da'Veawn Armstead (Sr.)	5	Chase Canada (Jr.)
S	11	Quinton Hammonds (So.)	13	Chris Gant Jr. (Fr.)
S	**3**	**EVAN JACKSON (JR.)**	49	Kamdon McFarland (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Kali Nguma (So.)	KR	1	Miles Coleman (So.)
P	41	Sawyer Evans (Sr.)	PR	1	Miles Coleman (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

QUINTON JACKSON

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"Hiring Scott [Abell] was an inspired move, and I think Rice is correct in thinking they have to stand out schematically to succeed at this level. The Stanford-Texas thing never took off with [Mike] Bloomgren, but they still need to do something that helps offset the lack of talent and close that gap against better teams in this league. ... They're sticking with the defensive scheme from the previous staff, the 4-2-5, and kept the LB coach [Jon Kay]. That's probably a smart move, at least in the short term. ... Running the option with a new roster isn't any easier than a transition to an Air Raid or pro style; there's a significant learning curve, so I wouldn't expect anything from these guys in their first year."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	17	Landon Ransom-Goelz (So.)	2	Aaron Turner (Sr.)
WR	**81**	**BRAYLEN WALKER (JR.)**	85	Justin Williams Jr. (So.)
WR	11	Tyson Thompson (Sr.)	6	Drayden Dickmann (So.)
LT	74	Brad Baur (Jr.)	76	John Long (Sr.)
LG	61	Trace Norfleet (Jr.)	54	Cole Morgan (So.)
C	**64**	**DAVID STICKLE (SR.)**	55	Netane Fehoko (Jr.)
RG	50	Patrick Valent (So.)	70	Isaiah Gonzalez (Sr.)
RT	**79**	**WESTON KROPP (JR.)**	67	Luke Needham (So.)
TE	49	Micah Barnett (Sr.)	82	Alex Scherle (Jr.)
QB	12	AJ Padgett (Jr.)	9	Chase Jenkins (So.)
RB	10	Quinton Jackson (Jr.)	20	Daelen Alexander (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	0	Jordan Campbell (Sr.)	1	Michael Daley (Jr.)
DT	**75**	**BLAKE BOENISCH (SR.)**	96	Dillan Botts (Jr.)
DT	30	Elroyal Morris III (Sr.)	99	Christopher Clark-Jolivet (So.)
EDGE	8	Joseph Mutombo (So.)	45	Demone Green (Jr.)
LB	**27**	**ANDREW AWE (SR.)**	56	Blaise Tita (Sr.)
LB	3	Ty Morris (Jr.)	54	Beau Barton (So.)
VIPER	**41**	**PLAE WYATT (SR.)**	38	Shepherd Bowling (Jr.)
CB	7	Omari Porter (Sr.)	10	Moh Bility (Jr.)
CB	25	AJ Stephens (So.)	21	Jamarion Clark (So.)
S	9	Peyton Stevenson (Sr.)	6	Ashton Ojiaku (So.)
S	29	Daveon Hook (Sr.)	4	Marcus Williams (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	28	Enock Gota (Jr.)	KR	10 Quinton Jackson (Jr.)
P	91	Alex Bacchetta (So.)	PR	11 Tyson Thompson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DAVID BUTLER II-IMAGN IMAGES

RICE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 128 | AAC PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD:4-8, 3-5 AAC

OFFENSE Offense will be the biggest question mark for the Owls under first-year head coach Scott Abell, who is bringing his own version of the option offense with him from FCS Davidson. The Owls will have a new quarterback under center for a third straight season after E.J. Warner entered the transfer portal following one season at Rice. Drew Devillier performed well in three games last season and is competing for the starting job with AJ Padgett, who did not see action last season but threw for 1,355 yards and 13 touchdowns in nine games during the 2022 and '23 seasons, and Chase Jenkins.

Whoever is starting at quarterback will be tasked with turning around a unit that ranked 112th nationally in scoring offense last season, averaging 22.2 points per game. The Owls will have some weapons surrounding the quarterback, led by running back Quinton Jackson and wide receiver Landon Ransom-Goelz.

DEFENSE The defense was a bright spot for the Owls last season, ranking No. 35 nationally in total defense (334.4 ypg), and that shouldn't change much with Jon Kay being elevated to defensive coordinator after spending last season as the linebackers coach.

The defense will be led by Kay's linebacking group, which returns Ty Morris, who tied for the team lead with 56 tackles and had a team-leading four sacks last season, as well as Andrew Awe. The Owls defense, which allowed 25.4 points per game last season, should be able to keep Rice in most games again this season.

SPECIALISTS Enock Gota should be the primary placekicker after a shaky season in 2024. Gota made 5-of-8 field-goal attempts with a long of 46 yards last season. Alex Bacchetta returns as the primary punter after averaging 41.5 yards per punt, with 11 inside the 20. The Owls need to tighten up their kick and punt coverage after ranking 130th and 91st, respectively, in the nation last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Owls, who are coming off a 4-8 season, should be able to accumulate at least that many wins in 2025, with the possibility of being in contention for a bowl game in Abell's first season. Abell's offense at Davidson averaged 35.3 points per game last season, and the Wildcats produced 436.5 yards per game of total offense, with 72.3% of that coming via the FCS' No. 1 rushing attack (315.5 ypg). Rice scored 20 or fewer points in eight games in 2024, so this season's success will come down to the offense and whether Abell's scheme can translate to the FBS.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 AAC)

Aug. 31	Sam Houston	L	14-34
Sept. 7	Texas Southern	W	69-7
Sept. 14	at Houston	L	7-33
Sept. 21	at Army	L	14-37
Sept. 28	Charlotte	L	20-21
Oct. 12	UTSA	W	29-27
Oct. 19	at Tulane	L	10-24
Oct. 26	at UConn	L	10-17
Nov. 2	Navy	W	24-10
Nov. 8	at Memphis	L	20-27
Nov. 23	at UAB	L	14-40
Nov. 30	South Florida	W	35-28

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Louisiana
Sept. 6	Houston
Sept. 13	Prairie View A&M
Sept. 18	at Charlotte
Sept. 27	at Navy
Oct. 4	Florida Atlantic
Oct. 11	at UTSA
Oct. 25	UConn
Oct. 31	Memphis
Nov. 8	UAB
Nov. 22	North Texas
Nov. 29	at South Florida

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ty Thames, LB	★★★
2.	Colter Alberding, IOL	★★★
3.	Tyvonn Byars, RB	★★★
4.	Keenan Arcega-Whiteside, TE	★★★
5.	Patrick Crayton Jr., QB	★★★
6.	Colin Leahey, RB	★★★
7.	Braden Bays, DL	★★★
8.	DeReyon Jenkins Jr., EDGE	★★★
9.	Ahran Ogbor, WR	★★★
10.	Will Swartz, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Abell • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 86-52 (13 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Vince Munch • Defensive Coordinator: Jon Kay • Location: Houston, Texas • Stadium: Rice Stadium (47,000)

SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 58 | AAC PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE After quarterback Byrum Brown suffered a knee injury that essentially ended his season in the fifth game of 2024, Bryce Archie rallied the South Florida Bulls to a 5-3 finish, including a five-overtime victory against San José State in the Hawaii Bowl. Both quarterbacks have returned to compete, although it's expected that Brown will regain the starting job. And he'll be throwing to a potential star in junior Keshaun Singleton (6-3, 212), whom teammates refer to as "baby Calvin Johnson."

The biggest challenge will be replacing three graduated running backs who combined for 1,728 rushing yards, 28 rushing touchdowns and 43 receptions. Charlotte transfer Cartevious Norton is the likely first option, but coaches are also high on sophomore mighty-mite Alvon Isaac.

The offensive line features five returning players with a combined 87 starts, plus the addition of Stanford transfer Connor McLaughlin.

DEFENSE The Bulls hope to build upon last season's ball-hawking defense, which ranked sixth nationally in tackles for a loss (7.9 per game) and tied for 13th in turnovers gained (25). Additionally, the Bulls had 32 sacks (the most in seven seasons) and tied a program record with seven vs. FAU.

The defense revolves around the linebacker duo of Mac Harris and Jhalyn Shuler, each of whom has led the teams in tackles during the past two seasons. But there's promise up front with defensive end Michael Williams II. The Bulls have added quality depth with Texas A&M transfer Josh Celiscar and the well-traveled Dre Butler, the No. 1-ranked junior-college prospect in 2020 who is on his sixth team. The Bulls also return three primary starters in the secondary.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Nico Gramatica — son of former NFL Pro Bowler Martin Gramatica — had a notable freshman season with makes from 58, 52 and 51 yards. Australian punter Andrew Stokes was an All-AAC performer as a senior (45.4-yard average), and two more Aussies are competing for his spot, Chase Leon and Luke Goater.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's Year 29 for South Florida's program, and the Bulls still don't have a conference title — not in the AAC or the program's previous homes (Conference USA and the Big East). Unquestionably, though, there has been progress under head coach Alex Golesh — two winning seasons and two bowl victories — after a four-year run of 8-37.

This season brings more promise. If Brown returns to form, and the defense lives up to its potential, the Bulls could contend for an AAC title.

There are challenges galore — a home opener against Boise State, followed by road tests at Florida and Miami (Fla.) — but making a significant AAC move remains South Florida's primary focus.

BYRUM BROWN

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"A really talented team that's a defense away from contending for the conference. This is a program that can compete for the G5 playoff spot. They're really talented and dynamic on offense. They have to keep that quarterback healthy on offense; otherwise, they're pretty stacked on that side of the ball. ... They've been really aggressive with the portal on defense. They need to overhaul the secondary and find a more consistent way to pressure the QB. ... Right now they're an eight-win-level team, but if they can stop allowing so many points, they'll shoot up to the top of the league. [Alex] Golesh will be a hot name for a P4 job soon."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (6)		
WR	11	**KESHAUN SINGLETON (JR.)**	2	Chas Nimrod (Jr.)
WR	12	Jaden Alexis (Sr.)	16	Jeremiah Koger (Fr.)
WR	80	Joshua Porter (So.)	0	Brandon Winton (So.)
LT	71	Connor McLaughlin (Sr.)	67	Thomas Shrader (Sr.)
LG	78	**JACK WILTY (SR.)**	74	Deonte Bowie (Sr.)
C	72	**COLE BEST (SR.)**	65	Mike Lofton (Sr.)
RG	51	**ZANE HERRING (SR.)**	56	Cole Skinner (Jr.)
RT	62	**DEREK BOWMAN (SR.)**	75	Khalil Walker (Jr.)
TE	18	Weston Wolff (Sr.)	1	Jonathan Echols (So.)
QB	17	**BYRUM BROWN (SR.)**	3	Bryce Archie (Sr.)
RB	5	Cartevious Norton (Sr.)	10	Alvon Isaac (So.)
		DEFENSE (6)		
EDGE	34	**RICO WATSON III (SR.)**	10	Ira Singleton (So.)
NG	91	Dre Butler (Sr.)	97	Jahari Grant (So.)
DT	40	Jacob Merrifield (Sr.)	50	Dinellson Exume (So.)
DE	4	Michael Williams II (Sr.)	8	Josh Celiscar (Sr.)
LB	24	**MAC HARRIS (SR.)**	12	Zavier Hamilton (So.)
LB	7	**JHALYN SHULER (SR.)**	6	Rodney Hill (So.)
CB	22	**DE'SHAWN RUCKER (SR.)**	23	Jonas Duclona (Jr.)
CB	1	Ben Knox (Sr.)	9	James Chenualt (So.)
NB	13	**KAJUAN BANKS (SR.)**	0	Jarvis Lee (Jr.)
SS	21	Jaelen Stokes (Sr.)	15	Fred Gaskin (So.)
FS	2	**TAVIN WARD (SR.)**	19	Boogsie Silvera (Sr.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	25	Nico Gramatica (So.)	KR 19	JeyQuan Smith (Jr.)
P	37	Chase Leon (Sr.)	PR 80	Joshua Porter (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 AAC)

Aug. 31	Bethune-Cookman	W	48-3
Sept. 7	at Alabama	L	16-42
Sept. 14	at Southern Miss	W	49-24
Sept. 21	Miami (Fla.)	L	15-50
Sept. 28	at Tulane	L	10-45
Oct. 12	Memphis	L	3-21
Oct. 19	UAB	W	35-25
Nov. 1	at Florida Atlantic	W	44-21
Nov. 9	Navy	L	7-28
Nov. 16	at Charlotte	W	59-24
Nov. 23	Tulsa	W	63-30
Nov. 30	at Rice	L	28-35
Dec. 24	vs. San José State # (ot)	W	41-39

#Hawaii Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Boise State
Sept. 6	at Florida
Sept. 13	at Miami (Fla.)
Sept. 20	South Carolina St.
Oct. 3	Charlotte
Oct. 10	at North Texas
Oct. 18	Florida Atlantic
Oct. 25	at Memphis
Nov. 6	UTSA
Nov. 15	at Navy
Nov. 22	at UAB
Nov. 29	Rice

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

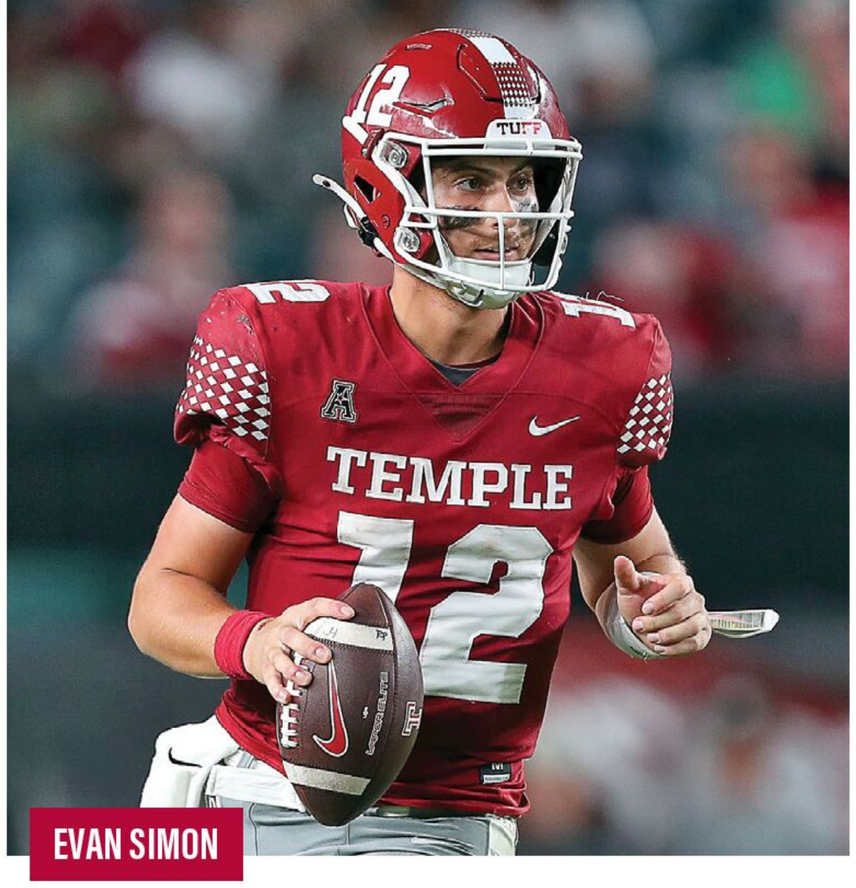
1.	Brooks Williams Jr., EDGE	★★★
2.	Khalil Walker, IOL	★★★
3.	Christian Neptune, WR	★★★
4.	Gerrick Gordon Jr., IOL	★★★
5.	Tray Kinkle, RB	★★★
6.	Gavin Jenkins, CB	★★★
7.	Caleb Harris, IOL	★★★
8.	Christian Smith, EDGE	★★★
9.	Jermichael Gillis, S	★★★
10.	Locklan Hewlett, QB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Alex Golesh • Record at School: 14-12 (2 years) • Career Record: 14-12 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Kodi Burns, Joel Gordon
Defensive Coordinator: Todd Orlando • Location: Tampa, Fla.
Stadium: Raymond James Stadium (69,218)

NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES



EVAN SIMON

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"[K.C.] Keeler is a really smart hire for them. This was the worst program in our league last year in terms of overall talent. I think the culture died out there; you could make them quit as soon as you got ahead. ... You're going to see a ton of portal guys starting on both sides of the ball this year while they figure out systems. It won't look great, but they want to hit reset on how the program recruits the region. Keeler is from that area, and that's the biggest reason they went with him. This isn't an easy place to recruit to; you really need to understand the region and find guys that fit at that place. ... It's a lot easier to build something at a place like Sam Houston or Delaware. Keeler's been successful all the way up, but this will be the hardest job he's taken, for sure."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	85	Kajiya Hollawayne (Sr.)	17	John Adams (Sr.)
WR	86	Xavier Irvin (Jr.)	10	Ian Stewart (Sr.)
WR	89	Tyler Stewart (So.)	19	Antonio Jones (Sr.)
LT	56	Kevin Terry (So.)	71	Giakoby Hills (Fr.)
LG	**52**	**ERIC KING (SO.)**	51	Mausa Palu (Jr.)
C	**57**	**GRAYSON MAINS (JR.)**	66	Chris Smith (Sr.)
RG	**75**	**LUKE WATSON (SO.)**	54	Jackson Pruitt (Jr.)
RT	**77**	**DIEGO BARAJAS (SR.)**	74	Davray Venu (Fr.)
TE	33	Ryder Kusch (Fr.)	88	Peter Clarke (Jr.)
QB	**12**	**EVAN SIMON (SR.)**		Gevani McCoy (Sr.)
RB	20	Jay Ducker (Sr.)	24	Joquez Smith (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	58	Sekou Kromah (Sr.)	25	Cam'Ron Stewart (Sr.)
DT	97	Allan Haye (Sr.)	98	Joseph Auzenne (Jr.)
DT	**40**	**DEMERICK MORRIS (SR.)**	88	Aaron Beckwith (Sr.)
OLB	35	Tyrese Whitaker (So.)	10	Ty Davis (Sr.)
LB	22	Eric Stuart (Jr.)	30	Jayvant Brown (So.)
LB		Jalen Stewart (Jr.)	36	Wesley Brown (Fr.)
CB	**24**	**BEN OSUEKE (SR.)**	32	Adrian Laing (Fr.)
CB	19	Jaylen Castleberry (Sr.)	21	Omar Ibrahim (Jr.)
S	29	Avery Powell (Jr.)	26	Ihsim Smith-Marsette (So.)
S	15	Javier Morton (Sr.)	12	Willy Love (So.)
S	14	Louis Frye (Sr.)	42	Zyil Powell (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	98	Carl Hardin (So.)	KR 89	Tyler Stewart (So.)
P	37	Dante Atton (Jr.)	PR 80	Preston Everhart (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

TEMPLE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 121 | AAC PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 AAC

OFFENSE Temple football enters the 2025 season determined to revitalize an offense that struggled mightily in 2024, ranking 125th (308.8 ypg) in total offense and 127th in rushing offense (92.8 ypg) nationally. To spark a turnaround, new Owls head coach K.C. Keeler brought in Tyler Walker as his offensive coordinator. Walker arrives from Montana State, where he helped engineer one of the most dynamic offenses at the FCS level.

Temple is hoping to shift back to a run-first identity, aiming to establish the ground game to open passing opportunities for quarterback Evan Simon. Simon returns after an inconsistent 2024 campaign, but his leadership and poise should give the Owls some stability. A key addition to the backfield is Jay Ducker, who followed Keeler to North Philly from Sam Houston and will be looking to become Temple's first 1,000-yard rusher since Ryquell Armstead in 2018. Helping that cause is an offensive line that Keeler described during the spring as "dramatically improved."

DEFENSE Temple's defense heads into the 2025 season with a new identity under coordinator Brian L. Smith, who joins Keeler's initial staff after making steady improvements to Rice's defense in recent years. The Owls will primarily operate out of a 3-3-5 base but plan to stay versatile in their looks.

The defensive line is considered the strongest unit on the team, featuring returning standout tackles Demerick Morris and Allan Haye, who are both finally healthy, as well as veteran end Sekou Kromah. Keeler has praised the group's depth, noting they can confidently rotate six or seven players.

Linebacker remains the biggest question mark after the departures of leading tacklers D.J. Woodbury Sr. and Tyquan King, although UMass transfer Jalen Stewart will arrive over the summer. The cornerback room is full of young but inexperienced talent. Safety is a relative strength as well, with veterans Javier Morton and Louis Frye joined by FCS Missouri State transfer Avery Powell; however, depth remains a concern.

SPECIALISTS Australian punter Dante Atton returns for his third straight year, offering consistency and versatility with his ability to switch between traditional and rugby-style punts. Placekicker Carl Hardin finally gets his shot after backing up Maddux Trujillo last season. In the return game, the Owls are likely to rely on sophomore wide receiver Tyler Stewart, who has flashed with his quickness and elusiveness.

FINAL ANALYSIS With Keeler, a proven winner, now at the helm, there is cautious optimism heading into the 2025 season. For Temple to push toward bowl eligibility, the team must assert control at the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball. Reclaiming a disciplined, "Temple TUFF" identity will be essential for the program to turn the corner this fall.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 AAC)			
Aug. 30	at Oklahoma	L	3-51
Sept. 7	at Navy	L	11-38
Sept. 14	Coastal Carolina	L	20-28
Sept. 21	Utah State	W	45-29
Sept. 26	Army	L	14-42
Oct. 5	at UConn	L	20-29
Oct. 19	Tulsa	W	20-10
Oct. 26	at East Carolina	L	34-56
Nov. 9	at Tulane	L	6-52
Nov. 16	Florida Atlantic (ot)	W	18-15
Nov. 22	at UTSA	L	27-51
Nov. 30	North Texas	L	17-24

2025 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 30	at UMass
Sept. 6	Howard
Sept. 13	Oklahoma
Sept. 20	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 4	UTSA
Oct. 11	Navy
Oct. 18	at Charlotte
Oct. 25	at Tulsa
Nov. 1	East Carolina
Nov. 8	at Army
Nov. 22	Tulane
Nov. 28/29	at North Texas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Zavien Bryant, CB	★★★
2. Jamarcus Pierre, CB	★★★
3. Jett White, CB	★★★
4. Troy Cunningham, DL	★★★
5. Devonte Grant, WR	★★★
6. Ryder Kusch, TE	★★★
7. Adriano McLean, EDGE	★★★
8. Decarlos Young, LB	★★★
9. Camren Boykin, QB	★★★
10. Rameir Hardy, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: K.C. Keeler • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 271-112-1 (31 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tyler Walker • Defensive Coordinator: Brian L. Smith • Location: Philadelphia, Pa. • Stadium: Lincoln Financial Field (67,594)

TULANE GREEN WAVE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 48 | AAC PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 9-5, 7-1 AAC

OFFENSE At the end of spring practice, it was unclear who Tulane's quarterback replacement for Darian Mensah (transferred to Duke) would be. Well-traveled front-runner TJ Finley transferred, leaving Kadin Semonza, a starter at Ball State last year, Iowa transfer Brendan Sullivan and Donovan Leary, a three-year backup at Illinois, to convince head coach Jon Sumrall not to dive back into the portal for another candidate.

The Green Wave will have a new look almost everywhere else, too. The top five in receptions from 2024 are gone. Bryce Bohanon, whose miniscule 121 receiving yards lead the returners, and former 4-star Alabama signee Shazz Preston, who missed most of 2024 with a hamstring injury, appear to be the best options.

Although two-time 1,000-yard running back Makhi Hughes transferred to Oregon, speedy Louisville transfer Maurice Turner and talented redshirt freshman Jamauri McClure are capable of replacing his production if an offensive line that lost three starters holds up.

DEFENSE Four of the top five tacklers return even though only three starters are back. Linebacker Sam Howard, an FCS Austin Peay transfer, was a revelation for his leadership (co-captain) and production (63 tackles, 5.5 tackles for a loss) after arriving in the summer of 2024. Safeties Bailey Despanie (53 tackles) and Jack Tchienchou (50 tackles) are solid.

Sumrall loved what he saw from the line in the spring, with an influx of transfers providing playmaking ability to complement holdover end Kameron Hamilton. Santana Hopper (Appalachian State), Mo Westmoreland (UTEP) and Tre'Von McAlpine (Texas Tech) stood out the most.

Cornerback is a concern. The top three from 2024 are gone, including the dynamic Rayshawn Pleasant, who entered the transfer portal in the spring. Potential replacements Jahiem Johnson and Armani Cargo never have started a game, and Cargo has yet to appear in one.

SPECIALISTS The spring departures of Pleasant, who returned two kickoffs for touchdowns, and reliable punter Will Karoll hurt a unit that will have a new look almost everywhere. Walk-on kicker Patrick Durkin made only 2-of-4 field goals after winning the job late last season, but he looked better in the spring. Incoming freshman Cooper Helmke has a huge leg.

FINAL ANALYSIS A practice observer who was an assistant under former Tulane head coach Willie Fritz raved about the Green Wave's talent level compared to five years ago, rating it at the top of the conference. The challenge will be getting this group to jell quickly with only five starters returning. A fourth straight appearance in the AAC title game hangs in the balance.

2024 RESULTS (9-5, 7-1 AAC)

Aug. 29	Southeastern Louisiana	W	52-0
Sept. 7	Kansas State	L	27-34
Sept. 14	at Oklahoma	L	19-34
Sept. 21	at Louisiana	W	41-33
Sept. 28	South Florida	W	45-10
Oct. 5	at UAB	W	71-20
Oct. 19	Rice	W	24-10
Oct. 26	at North Texas	W	45-37
Oct. 31	at Charlotte	W	34-3
Nov. 9	Temple	W	52-6
Nov. 16	at Navy	W	35-0
Nov. 28	Memphis	L	24-34
Dec. 6	at Army #	L	14-35
Dec. 20	vs. Florida %	L	8-33

#AAC Championship %Gasparilla Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Northwestern
Sept. 6	at South Alabama
Sept. 13	Duke
Sept. 20	at Ole Miss
Sept. 27	at Tulsa
Oct. 9	East Carolina
Oct. 18	Army
Oct. 30	at UTSA
Nov. 7	at Memphis
Nov. 15	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 22	at Temple
Nov. 29	Charlotte

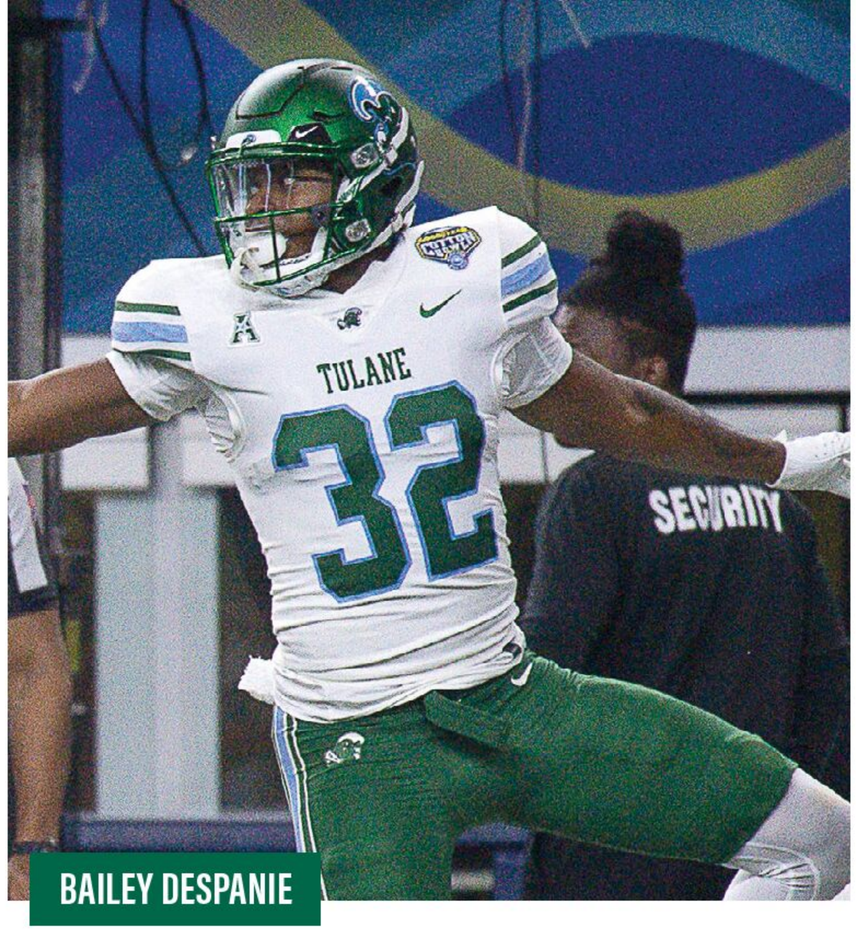
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Joshua Lewis, EDGE	★★★
2.	Michael Igbinoghene, CB	★★★
3.	Juelz Baptiste, OT	★★★
4.	Antwaun Parham, WR	★★★
5.	Javin Gordon, RB	★★★
6.	Gresham Perry, IOL	★★★
7.	Warren Roberts, EDGE	★★★
8.	Landon Hammond, CB	★★★
9.	PaLanding Drammeh, DL	★★★
10.	Nik Alston, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jon Sumrall • Record at School: 9-5 (1 year)
Career Record: 32-9 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Craddock
Defensive Coordinator: Greg Gasparato • Location: New Orleans, La.
Stadium: Yulman Stadium (30,000)



BAILEY DESPANIE

SCOUTING THE GREEN WAVE

"Even after losing the conference championship, this is still the class program of the league, which is the problem. They're trying to play a Power 4 game with a Group of 5 budget. Basically, all the skill-position players on offense are gone to bigger programs. They have to rebuild the backfield entirely and find some receivers, probably in the portal. ... The good news is that they have a really great defense. This is how Jon [Sumrall] built his best Troy rosters. Up front, they're brutal, and they can carry these guys, provided they can get it going on offense. ... Even with the massive losses on offense, this is one of the best programs in the entire G5, and no one expects this staff to be around much longer."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)					
WR	6	Shazz Preston (Jr.)	80	Oliver Mitchell Jr. (Fr.)
WR	83	Bryce Bohanon (Sr.)	5	Anthony Brown-Stephens (Jr.)
WR	1	Omari Hayes (So.)	4	Jimmy Calloway (Sr.)
LT	**76**	**DERRICK GRAHAM (SR.)**	55	Dominic Steward (Fr.)
LG	**56**	**SHADRE HURST (JR.)**	71	Jayce Mitchell (Fr.)
C	58	Jack Hollifield (Sr.)	73	Elijah Baker (Fr.)
RG	51	John Bock (Sr.)	74	Landry Cannon (So.)
RT	78	Reese Baker (Fr.)	77	Darion Reed (So.)
TE	85	Anthony Miller (So.)	88	Justyn Reid (Jr.)
QB	3	Kadin Semonza (So.)	10	Donovan Leary (Jr.)
RB	24	Maurice Turner (Jr.)	25	Jamauri McClure (Fr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**6**	**KAMERON HAMILTON (SR.)**	92	Gerrod Henderson (Jr.)
NT	55	Tre'Von McAlpine (Jr.)	93	Elijah Champaigne (Sr.)
DT	29	Santana Hopper (Jr.)	94	Derrick Shepard Jr. (Jr.)
OLB	0	Mo Westmoreland (Sr.)	48	Jah'rie Garner (So.)
LB	**15**	**SAM HOWARD (SR.)**	42	Makai Williams (Jr.)
LB	2	Dickson Agu (So.)	4	Chris Rodgers (Jr.)
CB	20	Jahiem Johnson (Jr.)	11	E'zaiah Shine (Fr.)
CB	14	Armani Cargo (Fr.)	8	Isaiah Wadsworth (Sr.)
NB	3	Javion White (So.)	21	Jayden Lewis (So.)
S	**32**	**BAILEY DESPANIE (SR.)**	7	Kevin Adams III (So.)
S	1	Jack Tchienchou (So.)	30	Joshua Moore (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	91	Patrick Durkin (Fr.)	KR 83	Bryce Bohanon (Sr.)
P	34	William Hudlow (So.)	PR 1	Omari Hayes (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JEROME MIRON-USA TODAY SPORTS

KIRK FRANCIS

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN HURRICANE

"What a culture change. There's no bigger swing than going from [Kevin] Wilson to a guy like Tre Lamb. Tre has a ton of respect as a young, enthusiastic builder. He's done a great job at two FCS stops. ... The problem is that Wilson's culture was awful, and they had very little talent at the end. ... They were one of the worst defenses we've ever seen in the league last season. ... This is the best position the university has put the program in that I can remember. They have to fix their NIL issue and give Tre some time, but enthusiasm and new ideas — that's the kind of mentality a program like Tulsa needs."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	0	Zion Booker (Jr.)	7	Zion Steptoe (Jr.)
WR	3	Micah Tease (So.)	**19**	**GRAYSON TEMPEST (JR.)**
WR	8	Mekhi Miller (Sr.)	15	Josh Smith (Fr.)
LT	72	JaQuan Adams (Sr.)	78	Daniel Ademisoye (Jr.)
LG	77	Brody Duffel (So.)	65	Sean Hill (Sr.)
C	62	Simon Wilson (Sr.)	76	Josh Love (Fr.)
RG	**50**	**ENDER AGUILAR (SR.)**	66	Will Morris (So.)
RT	60	Hunter Erb (Jr.)	71	Bennett Ringleb (So.)
TE	80	Brody Foley (Jr.)	23	Landen Lucas (Sr.)
QB	**11**	**KIRK FRANCIS (SO.)**	9	Stephen Kittleman (Sr.)
RB	1	Braylin Presley (Sr.)	28	Sevion Morrison (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	54	Byron Turner Jr. (Sr.)	41	Will Upshaw (Fr.)
DT	**99**	**TAI NEWHOUSE (JR.)**	90	Joe Hjelle (Jr.)
DT	88	Nahki Johnson (Sr.)	58	Tyler Rich (So.)
DE	11	J'Dan Burnett (Jr.)	30	Maruio White Jr. (So.)
LB	6	Chris Thompson (Sr.)	33	William Alexander (Jr.)
LB	0	Ray Coney (Jr.)	34	Elijah Wilson (So.)
LB	16	Devin Robinson (So.)	24	Buddha Garrett (So.)
CB	3	JD Drew (Jr.)	4	Anthony Romphf (Sr.)
CB	**5**	**KEUAN PARKER (SR.)**	**13**	**NUNU CAMPBELL (JR.)**
S	15	Ashton Williams (So.)	9	Dax Collins (So.)
S	18	Zach Williams (So.)	2	Jehlen Cannady (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	11	Seth Morgan (Sr.)	KR	1 Braylin Presley (Sr.)
P	29	Angus Davies (Jr.)	PR	0 Zion Booker (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 130 | AAC PREDICTION: 14 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 AAC

OFFENSE Welcome to the Tre Lamb era at the University of Tulsa. Lamb was hired as head coach in December after Kevin Wilson was fired a game short of completing his second season. Lamb, 35, brings plenty of youthful enthusiasm to the third head-coaching job of his career. A former college quarterback, Lamb also was the play-caller at East Tennessee State in 2024, where his offense ranked in the top 30 in the FCS.

Tulsa, ranked in the middle of the pack in total offense in the American Athletic Conference in 2024, will be rebuilding from the ground up. Two portal pickups, JaQuan Adams and Simon Wilson, anchor an offensive line replacing four starters. Kirk Francis, a Tulsa-area product, will start at quarterback after making seven starts a year ago and throwing for 1,585 yards.

Lamb likes the skill of his receivers, anchored by three portal signees. But with a new staff and so many new pieces, the offense figures to be a work in progress well into the season.

DEFENSE The Hurricane gave up the most 50-plus-yard plays from scrimmage (19) and the most passing plays of 20 yards or more in the FBS a year ago, so the defense's complete overhaul isn't a bad thing.

TU started the same four defensive linemen in all 12 games, but only one of those players returns (junior Tai Newhouse). Three of the team's five leading tacklers graduated, and one left via the transfer portal.

The Hurricane are building through the portal under defensive coordinator Josh Reardon, who had the same title for Lamb at ETSU.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game is one place of stability. Seth Morgan returns after testing the portal. He made 10-of-15 field-goal attempts with a long of 47. Angus Davies was a top-35 punter nationally, averaging 43.6 yards on 68 attempts (tied for fifth in the country). But the new staff will need to eliminate the near-weekly special teams breakdowns that plagued TU a year ago — the Hurricane gave up the second-most punt returns of 20 or more yards in the nation and had two kicks blocked.

FINAL ANALYSIS Lamb said in his introductory press conference that he expected Tulsa to play in a bowl game in Year 1. But that figures to be a very tough task given the schedule. The Hurricane play Oklahoma State and Oregon State in non-conference action and faces five of the top six finishers in the 2024 AAC standings.

Hoping for five wins seems realistic. Maybe a better way to measure progress will be in the team's competitiveness. A year ago, four of ETSU's five losses were by seven or fewer points. Six of TU's nine losses were by 30 or more.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 AAC)

Aug. 29	Northwestern State	W	62-28
Sept. 7	at Arkansas State	L	24-28
Sept. 14	Oklahoma State	L	10-45
Sept. 21	at Louisiana Tech (ot)	W	23-20
Sept. 28	at North Texas	L	20-52
Oct. 5	Army	L	7-49
Oct. 19	at Temple	L	10-20
Oct. 26	UTSA	W	46-45
Nov. 2	at UAB	L	21-59
Nov. 14	East Carolina	L	31-38
Nov. 23	at South Florida	L	30-63
Nov. 30	Florida Atlantic	L	16-63

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Abilene Christian
Sept. 6	at New Mexico St.
Sept. 13	Navy
Sept. 19	at Oklahoma State
Sept. 27	Tulane
Oct. 4	at Memphis
Oct. 16	at East Carolina
Oct. 25	Temple
Nov. 8	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 15	Oregon State
Nov. 22	at Army
Nov. 29	UAB

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Javion Antai, IOL	★★★
2.	Kelvin Washington, RB	★★★
3.	Tristan Lawyer, LB	★★★
4.	Donnell Gee Jr., WR	★★★
5.	Ian Mayes, IOL	★★★
6.	Luke Tevis, TE	★★★
7.	Jace Williams, CB	★★★
8.	Andrew Alford, QB	★★★
9.	Evan Odom, OT	★★★
10.	Decari Prater, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tre Lamb • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 27-25 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brad Robbins
Defensive Coordinator: Josh Reardon • Location: Tulsa, Okla. • Stadium: H.A. Chapman Stadium (30,000)

UAB BLAZERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 125 | AAC PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 AAC

OFFENSE Finding playmakers should not be a problem. Giving those playmakers opportunities to make plays just might be a problem. UAB lost two projected starters in the spring transfer portal and now return just one starter — tackle JonDarius Morgan — on the offensive line. There is some experience up front, but that group still has a long way to go to help the offense be successful.

Now let's get to those playmakers. It starts with quarterback Jalen Kitna, who had an adventurous eight games during his first chance to be a college starter. He threw for 2,209 yards and 17 touchdowns while completing 62% of his passes. He also had 11 interceptions and was fumble-prone. If he irons out the turnover problem, then he can get the ball to a crowded group of receivers and running backs. Isaiah Jacobs is a big-play threat at running back if healthy, and UTEP transfer Jevon Jackson could be the starter at some point. Corri Milliner is poised for a breakout season at wide receiver, and the Blazers helped themselves in the transfer portal at that spot.

DEFENSE It's not hard to imagine that UAB will be better on defense. The Blazers certainly can't be much worse than the past two seasons, when they finished 118th and 94th nationally in total defense and 127th and 119th in scoring defense, respectively. New defensive coordinator Steve Russ steps in with plans on improving things, and he brought a totally revamped staff that's full of NFL experience with him. Safety Sirad Bryant, who was third on the team with 60 tackles last season, is the only returning player who finished in the top 10 for the Blazers. Fellow safety returnee AJ Brown, who had 31 tackles, was 11th on the list.

Defensive tackles Nigel Tate (Boston College) and Denver Warren (Sam Houston) joined the team via the transfer portal to anchor the defensive line. Eddy Toussom has the size (6-5, 240) and athleticism to stand out at inside linebacker. Depth at all levels should be a strength of the UAB defense.

SPECIALISTS Jonah Delange is one of the nation's most consistent kickers. He was 21-of-24 on field goals, made all 31 extra points and was a Lou Groza Award semifinalist and the AAC Special Teams Player of the Year. Patrick Foley enters his third season as the UAB punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS Trent Dilfer is probably coaching for his job in 2025. Anything less than a bowl appearance, and Dilfer's tenure at UAB could end after three seasons. UAB faces five bowl teams from last year in the first eight games. Can a team that has so many newcomers jell quickly enough to be in good position at the end of that stretch?

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 AAC)

Aug. 29	Alcorn State	W	41-3
Sept. 7	at ULM	L	6-32
Sept. 14	at Arkansas	L	27-37
Sept. 28	Navy	L	18-41
Oct. 5	Tulane	L	20-71
Oct. 12	at Army	L	10-44
Oct. 19	at South Florida	L	25-35
Nov. 2	Tulsa	W	59-21
Nov. 9	UConn	L	23-31
Nov. 16	at Memphis	L	18-53
Nov. 23	Rice	W	40-14
Nov. 30	at Charlotte	L	27-29

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Alabama State
Sept. 6	at Navy
Sept. 13	Akron
Sept. 20	at Tennessee
Oct. 4	Army
Oct. 11	at Florida Atlantic
Oct. 18	Memphis
Nov. 1	at UConn
Nov. 8	at Rice
Nov. 15	North Texas
Nov. 22	South Florida
Nov. 29	at Tulsa

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen Elder, WR	★★★
2.	Aaron Mattingly, TE	★★★
3.	Gabriel Cline, TE	★★★
4.	James Steel, DL	★★★
5.	CD Gill, WR	★★★
6.	Zach Johnson, EDGE	★★★
7.	Aidan Platt, IOL	★★★
8.	Ja'Lyen Judson, CB	★★★
9.	Donovan Lawrence, IOL	★★★
10.	Tristan Anderson, ATH	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Trent Dilfer • Record at School: 7-17 (2 years) • Career Record: 7-17 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Alex Mortensen • Defensive Coordinator: Steve Russ • Location: Birmingham, Ala. • Stadium: Protective Stadium (47,100)

JALEN KITNA

SCOUTING THE BLAZERS

"They're in win-now mode. If it wasn't for [Trent] Dilfer's buyout, the staff would already be fired. ... Bill Clark created a blueprint for this program, and the administration screwed it all up. Dilfer isn't an idiot, but you don't know what you don't know, and he has no idea how to manage a college roster. ... They've lost a ton of their best guys to power programs this cycle, and they've replaced them with lesser-quality players. They're all-in on [QB Jalen] Kitna, but there's not enough around him to succeed, honestly. With the staff turnover in the offseason, we heard a lot about culture issues inside the locker room. ... If they can somehow win six games, Dilfer's price tag will probably save him."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	1	Corri Milliner (So.)	5	Kaleb Brown (Jr.)
WR	0	Iverson Hooks (So.)	18	Evan McCray (Sr.)
WR	2	AJ Johnson (Sr.)	8	Xavier Daisy (So.)
LT	77	Logan Moore (So.)	74	Barry Walker (Fr.)
LG	75	Calib Perez (Jr.)	58	Ryan Gunter (Jr.)
C	68	Adam Lepkowski (Jr.)	53	Baron Franks II (Sr.)
RG	53	Baron Franks II (Sr.)	59	Jaden Ligon (Fr.)
RT	**70**	**JONDARIUS MORGAN (SR.)**	73	Mason Chorak (So.)
TE	88	J.C. Sivley (So.)	85	Antonio Ferguson (So.)
QB	**7**	**JALEN KITNA (SR.)**	11	Adrian Posse (Fr.)
RB	3	Isaiah Jacobs (Sr.)	4	Jevon Jackson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

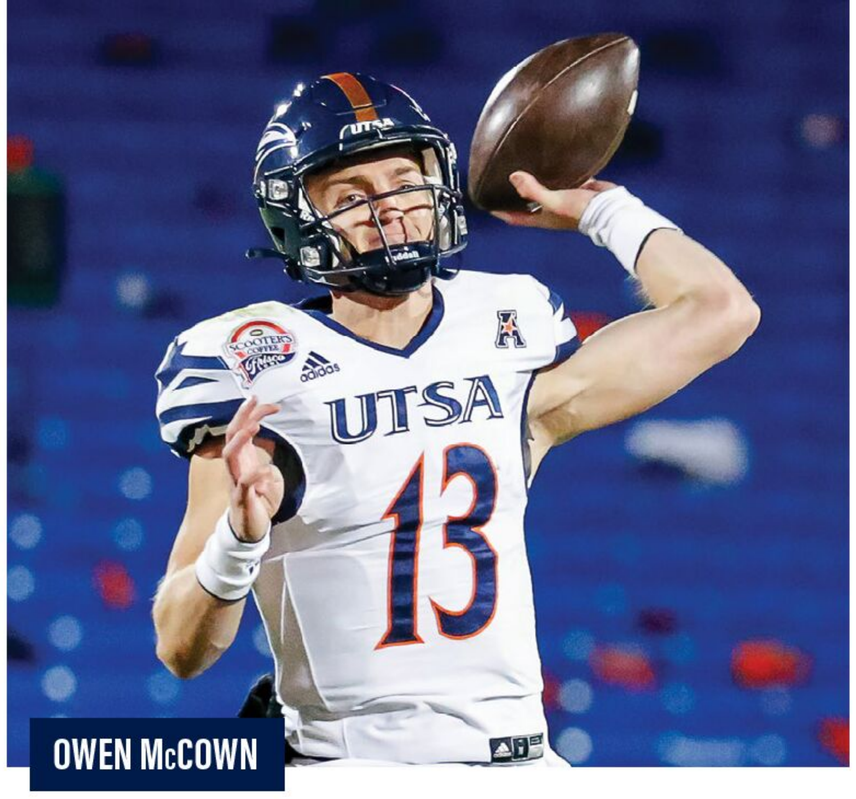
DE	44	Jamichael Rogers (Sr.)	4	Amorie Morrison (Sr.)
DT	95	Nigel Tate (Sr.)	99	Eamon Smalls (So.)
DT	9	Denver Warren (Sr.)	14	JaSire Peterson (So.)
DE	19	Demarcus Smith (Sr.)	59	Chris Burge (Fr.)
EDGE	2	Ezra Odinjor (So.)	25	James Smyre (Sr.)
LB	6	Calvin Pitcher (Sr.)	0	Devin Hightower (Sr.)
LB	5	Eddy Toussom (Sr.)	26	Tylan McNichols (So.)
CB	3	Jaylyn Ferguson (So.)	1	Tariq Watson (Jr.)
CB	11	Perry Fisher (Jr.)	16	Tamarion Crumpley (Sr.)
S	**12**	**SIRAD BRYANT (SR.)**	33	Kyle McKinney (So.)
S	20	AJ Brown (Jr.)	21	Josh Baka (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Jonah Delange (Jr.)	KR	11 Solomon Beebe (So.)
P	27	Patrick Foley (Sr.)	PR	1 Tariq Watson (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES



OWEN McCOWN

SCOUTING THE ROADRUNNERS

"Last year was a big transition for these guys. I would say going into this season, they're pretty set on offense and like what they have in [Owen] McCown, and they still have a tremendous amount of work to do on defense. ... They're really deep and talented at the receiver position and even brought in a few extra guys. This offense is going to be good, and this is a league with a lot of good offenses. ... Defensively, they got hit really hard by the portal. Losing the edge [Jimmori] Robinson to WVU was a big blow. They're going to be held back by the defense when they start; they're just so inexperienced. ... [Jeff] Traylor is a really great program manager. It will be interesting to see how they balance the portal and Texas recruiting long term. They set a high expectation when they came into this league, but they haven't been able to put a complete team out there yet."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (11)

WR	14	**DEVIN MCCUIN (JR.)**	86	Jamel Hardy (So.)
WR	18	David Amador II (So.)	15	DJ Allen Jr. (Jr.)
WR	19	**WILLIE MCCOY (SR.)**	88	De'Corian Clark (Sr.)
LT	55	**KAMAR MISSOURI (SR.)**	63	Trevor Timmons (Sr.)
LG	75	**VENLY TATAFU (SR.)**	73	Demetris Allen (Sr.)
C	57	**BEN RIOS (JR.)**	**76**	**LUKE LAPEZE (JR.)**
RG	53	**CORY GODINET (SR.)**	77	Devron Williams Jr. (Fr.)
RT	71	**JAYLEN GARTH (SR.)**	74	Darrell Jones (Jr.)
TE	88	**HOUSTON THOMAS (JR.)**	89	Patrick Overmyer (So.)
QB	13	**OWEN MCCOWN (JR.)**	17	Brandon Tennison (So.)
RB	20	**ROBERT HENRY JR. (SR.)**	22	Bryson Donnell (Jr.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	35	Jon Jones (Sr.)	42	Daemian Wimberly (So.)
DT	98	Jameian Buxton (Jr.)	90	Chidera Otutu (So.)
DE	99	Tai Leonard (Jr.)	97	Kaian Roberts-Day (Jr.)
SLB	13	Owen Pewee (Jr.)	26	Bryce Grays (Jr.)
ILB	17	Shad Banks Jr. (Sr.)	40	Brandon Tucker (Jr.)
ILB	10	Kendrick Blackshire (Sr.)	24	Ian Jackson (Sr.)
WLB	31	Vic Shaw (So.)	23	Camron Cooper (Jr.)
CB	30	Davin Martin (So.)	27	Jakevian Rodgers (So.)
CB	28	Kaden Meier (Jr.)	20	Zach Morris (Sr.)
S	14	Jermarius Lewis (Sr.)	22	Elijah Newell (Fr.)
S	18	Jimmy Wyrick (So.)	15	Tyan Milton (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Michael Petro (So.)	KR	19	Willie McCoy (Sr.)
P	25	Caile Hogan (Sr.)	PR	19	Willie McCoy (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ANDREW DIEB-USA TODAY SPORTS

UTSA ROADRUNNERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 63 | AAC PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE UTSA's offense projects as the team's strength this season, led by returning junior quarterback Owen McCown, who averaged 263.4 passing yards per game with 25 touchdowns against 10 interceptions in his first season with the Roadrunners.

Top rusher Robert Henry Jr. (706 yards, seven touchdowns) is back for an extra year of eligibility thanks to the blanket junior college waiver, and McCown will have proven wideouts Devin McCuin, David Amador II and Willie McCoy, as well as tight ends Houston Thomas and Patrick Overmyer.

The Roadrunners are also returning every starter on the offensive line, hoping that continuity will lead to even better performance for an offense that ranked 12th in the FBS last year with 451.2 yards per game.

DEFENSE The Roadrunners will be looking for a lot of new answers on defense, losing 11 of the 12 players who were on the field for the most snaps last season. Outside linebacker Vic Shaw will be relied on to emerge as UTSA's top pass-rusher, stepping into a position that produced the American Athletic Conference Defensive Player of the Year the past two seasons (Trey Moore in 2023 and Jimmori Robinson in 2024).

At linebacker, transfer Shad Banks Jr. will be called on immediately after totaling 114 tackles across 42 career games at TCU, and Kendrick Blackshire is expected to step forward after a quiet first season with UTSA as a transfer from Alabama.

New faces will have to develop up front to replicate the defensive line depth that has been a signature for the Roadrunners in recent years, and UTSA will likely be in the market to add to a shallow cornerback room through the summer.

SPECIALISTS Tate Sandell took over kicking duties in the middle of the season last year and proved up to the task, but he transferred to Oklahoma in the spring, leaving UTSA scrambling at that spot. McCoy has been a standout kickoff returner for the past two years, but the punt return job is likely up for grabs entering the fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS After contending for conference championships in three straight seasons under head coach Jeff Traylor, the Roadrunners took an unexpected step back last season, slipping to 7-6. But after a 3-5 start that included embarrassing losses to Tulsa, Rice and rival Texas State, UTSA closed strong, winning four of its final five games. With returning talent on offense and Traylor's renewed focus on discipline this spring in hopes of curbing penalties, the Roadrunners should be back near the top of the AAC in 2025.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 AAC)

Aug. 31	Kennesaw State	W	28-16
Sept. 7	at Texas State	L	10-49
Sept. 14	at Texas	L	7-56
Sept. 21	Houston Christian	W	45-7
Sept. 28	at East Carolina	L	20-30
Oct. 12	at Rice	L	27-29
Oct. 19	Florida Atlantic	W	38-24
Oct. 26	at Tulsa	L	45-46
Nov. 2	Memphis	W	44-36
Nov. 15	North Texas	W	48-27
Nov. 22	Temple	W	51-27
Nov. 30	at Army	L	24-29
Dec. 23	at Coastal Carolina #	W	44-15

#Myrtle Beach Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Texas A&M
Sept. 6	Texas State
Sept. 13	Incarnate Word
Sept. 20	at Colorado St.
Oct. 4	at Temple
Oct. 11	Rice
Oct. 18	at North Texas
Oct. 30	Tulane
Nov. 6	at South Florida
Nov. 15	at Charlotte
Nov. 22	East Carolina
Nov. 28/29	Army

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Max Gerlich, QB	★★★★
2.	A'marion Breland, OT	★★★
3.	Ty Rupe, TE	★★★
4.	Isaiah Butler-Tanner, TE	★★★
5.	Kingston Jones, WR	★★★
6.	Aden Hall, LB	★★★
7.	King Justice, DL	★★★
8.	Corey Walls, EDGE	★★★
9.	Mark Rayson III, S	★★★
10.	Anthony Pinnace III, CB	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Traylor • Record at School: 46-20 (5 years)
Career Record: 46-20 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Justin Burke
Defensive Coordinator: Jess Loepp • Location: San Antonio, Texas
Stadium: Alamodome (64,000)

BIG 12 PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. KANSAS STATE WILDCATS
2. ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS
3. TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS
4. IOWA STATE CYCLONES
5. BAYLOR BEARS
6. BYU COUGARS
7. UTAH UTES
8. KANSAS JAYHAWKS
9. TCU HORNED FROGS
10. COLORADO BUFFALOES
11. HOUSTON COUGARS
12. CINCINNATI BEARCATS
13. OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS
14. WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS
15. ARIZONA WILDCATS
16. UCF KNIGHTS

BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP

KANSAS STATE OVER ARIZONA STATE

ALL-BIG 12 TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	SAM LEAVITT	Arizona State
RB	JAHIEM WHITE	West Virginia
RB	BRYSON WASHINGTON	Baylor
AP	DYLAN EDWARDS	Kansas State
WR	JORDYN TYSON	Arizona State
WR	CHASE ROBERTS	BYU
WR	ERIC McALISTER	TCU
TE	JOE ROYER	Cincinnati
C	BRYCE FOSTER	Kansas
OL	JORDAN SEATON	Colorado
OL	SPENCER FANO	Utah
OL	CALEB LOMU	Utah
OL	BEN COLEMAN	Arizona State

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	DONTAY CORLEONE	Cincinnati
DL	DOMONIQUE ORANGE	Iowa State
DL	DEAN MILLER	Kansas
DL	LEE HUNTER	Texas Tech
LB	ISAIAH GLASKER	BYU
LB	KEATON THOMAS	Baylor
LB	JACOB RODRIGUEZ	Texas Tech
LB	AUSTIN ROMAINE	Kansas State
CB	JONTEZ WILLIAMS	Iowa State
CB	DJ McKINNEY	Colorado
S	XAVION ALFORD	Arizona State
S	BUD CLARK	TCU

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	WILL FERRIN	BYU
P	PALMER WILLIAMS	Baylor
KR	MEKHI MEWS	Houston
PR	JOSH CAMERON	Baylor

BOWL PROJECTIONS

LA: Colorado vs. UNLV
Rate: Baylor vs. Minnesota
Liberty: Kansas vs. Auburn
Las Vegas: Arizona State vs. Nebraska
Pop-Tarts: BYU vs. Louisville
Alamo: Texas Tech vs. USC
Independence: TCU vs. Vanderbilt
Sun: Utah vs. Duke
Texas: Iowa State vs. Oklahoma
First Responder: Houston vs. Oregon State
Cotton (CFP quarterfinals): Kansas State vs. Ohio State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

ARIZONA
Offense: New: Seth Doege
Old: Matt Adkins
Defense: New: Danny Gonzales
Old: Duane Akina

CINCINNATI
Defense: New: Cortney Braswell, Tyson Veidt
Old: Tyson Veidt

HOUSTON
Offense: New: Slade Nagle
Old: Kevin Barbay
Defense: New: Austin Armstrong
Old: Shiel Wood

KANSAS
Offense: New: Matt Lubick, Jim Zebrowski
Old: Jeff Grimes
Defense: New: DK McDonald
Old: Brian Borland

KANSAS STATE
Offense: New: Matt Wells
Old: Conor Riley, Matt Wells

OKLAHOMA STATE
Offense: New: Doug Meacham
Old: Kasey Dunn
Defense: New: Todd Grantham
Old: Bryan Nardo

TEXAS TECH
Offense: New: Mack Leftwich
Old: Zach Kittley
Defense: New: Shiel Wood
Old: Tim DeRuyter

UCF
Offense: New: Steve Cooper
Old: Tim Harris Jr., Darin Hinshaw
Defense: New: Alex Grinch
Old: Ted Roof

UTAH
Offense: New: Jason Beck
Old: Mike Bajakian (interim)

WEST VIRGINIA
Offense: New: Rich Rodriguez
Old: Chad Scott
Defense: New: Zac Alley
Old: Jeff Koonz (interim)

JORDYN TYSON, ARIZONA STATE
LEE HUNTER, TEXAS TECH

FROM LEFT: PATRICK BREEN/THE REPUBLIC; PATRICK BREEN/THE REPUBLIC

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	David Bailey	DL	Texas Tech	Stanford
	Bailey's pass-rushing prowess should help turn around the Red Raiders' defense.			
2.	Conner Weigman	QB	Houston	Texas A&M
	A former 5-star prospect, Weigman gets a fresh start in Willie Fritz's offense.			
3.	Devon Dampier	QB	Utah	New Mexico
	Dampier ran for more than 1,000 yards in 2024.			
4.	Lee Hunter	DL	Texas Tech	UCF
	Nicknamed "The Fridge," Hunter is a big-bodied run-stopper with starting experience.			
5.	Chase Sowell	WR	Iowa State	East Carolina
	Sowell might be quarterback Rocco Becht's new No. 1 target.			
6.	Kaidon Salter	QB	Colorado	Liberty
	Salter is a dual-threat option under center who made 29 career starts for the Flames.			
7.	Jordan Dwyer	WR	TCU	Idaho
	One of the top FCS receivers in 2024, Dwyer reinforces the Frogs' receiving corps.			
8.	Romello Height	DL	Texas Tech	Georgia Tech
	Lubbock is the fourth stop for the well-traveled Height, a proven pass-rusher.			
9.	Howard Sampson	OL	Texas Tech	North Carolina
	Sampson bookends the Red Raiders' revamped offensive line around Behren Morton.			
10.	Tanner Koziol	TE	Houston	Ball State/Wisconsin
	Koziol could become Conner Weigman's safety blanket.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. TCU (26)
2. Colorado (35)
3. Kansas State (37)
4. Utah (38)
5. Baylor (40)
6. Oklahoma State (41)
7. West Virginia (42)
8. Texas Tech (43)
9. Arizona State (45)
10. Arizona (48)
11. Houston (53)
12. Iowa State (58)
13. BYU (60)
14. UCF (62)
15. Cincinnati (65)
16. Kansas (69)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 23 Kansas State vs. Iowa State (Ireland)
Sept. 6 Kansas at Missouri
Sept. 13 Pitt at West Virginia
Sept. 20 SMU at TCU
Oct. 18 Baylor at TCU
Oct. 18 Utah at BYU
Oct. 18 Texas Tech at Arizona State
Oct. 25 BYU at Iowa State
Oct. 25 Kansas State at Kansas
Nov. 1 Arizona State at Iowa State
Nov. 8 BYU at Texas Tech
Nov. 29 Colorado at Kansas State

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Linkon Cure	TE	Kansas State	★★★★	51
2.	Alex Manske	QB	Iowa State	★★★★	55
3.	Kilian Registe	OT	TCU	★★★★	73
4.	Isaiah Mizell	WR	Arizona	★★★★	104
5.	Kaleb Burns	LB	Baylor	★★★★	105
6.	Julian Lewis	QB	Colorado	★★★★	114
7.	Carde Smith	OT	Colorado	★★★★	120
8.	Michael Dever	WR	Texas Tech	★★★★	150
9.	Adam Schobel	QB	TCU	★★★★	154
10.	Chad Woodfork	EDGE	TCU	★★★★	171

Rankings per On3

ARIZONA WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 72 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 15 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE Arizona head coach Brent Brennan managed to keep quarterback Noah Fifita and wide receiver Tetairoa McMillan for his 2024 desert debut season, but the offense — and ultimately the team — failed to meet expectations. The Wildcats had the second-worst scoring offense in the Big 12 on their way to a disappointing 4-8 finish. Even with a first-round NFL Draft pick at receiver in McMillan, Arizona's offense sputtered, as the Wildcats had the second-worst rushing offense in the Big 12 and deployed seven different starting lineups along the offensive line.

Arizona hit the reset button in the offseason with new offensive coordinator Seth Doege, a Mike Leach disciple, and speedy additions at wide receiver and running back in the transfer portal.

Additionally, Arizona's offensive linemen have to be conditioned to execute Doege's up-tempo offense, and the Wildcats have numbers on their side, signing 11 scholarship offensive linemen for 2025. If Arizona can protect Fifita and allow the UA quarterback to orchestrate the offense, the Wildcats should improve despite McMillan's departure.

DEFENSE Arizona accrued a plethora of injuries on this side of the ball in 2024, losing three defensive captains to knee injuries: linebacker Jacob Manu, defensive back Treydan Stukes and safety Gunner Maldonado. Arizona used a dime defense instead of its base 4-2-5 alignment in the second half of the season as a result. The Wildcats finished with the 14th-ranked rushing defense in the Big 12, allowing 174 yards per game.

Fortunately for Arizona, a majority of its secondary is returning, including Stukes and free safety Genesis Smith. With new defensive coordinator Danny Gonzales at the helm and a dozen new scholarship defensive linemen, the Wildcats have a stop-the-run focus. Gonzales, the former New Mexico head coach, is a Rocky Long disciple who had brief but successful coordinator stints at San Diego State and Arizona State.

SPECIALISTS With placekicker Tyler Loop, a major weapon the past two seasons, now gone, the Wildcats have a competition between Michael Salgado-Medina, who started at punter last season, and social media superstar Cash Peterman. Salgado-Medina could become the first full-time starting kicker-slash-punter at Arizona since Nick Folk in 2006.

FINAL ANALYSIS The good news for Arizona? The Wildcats' in-state rival, Arizona State, was voted last in the Big 12 poll last season and then won the conference championship en route to the College Football Playoff. Arizona has several questions that need answers, but the Wildcats have five home games in the first half of the schedule. That could give them a boost to bowl eligibility in Brennan's second season.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	New Mexico	W	61-39
Sept. 7	Northern Arizona	W	22-10
Sept. 13	at Kansas State	L	7-31
Sept. 28	at Utah	W	23-10
Oct. 5	Texas Tech	L	22-28
Oct. 12	at BYU	L	19-41
Oct. 19	Colorado	L	7-34
Oct. 26	West Virginia	L	26-31
Nov. 2	at UCF	L	12-56
Nov. 15	Houston	W	27-3
Nov. 23	at TCU	L	28-49
Nov. 30	Arizona State	L	7-49

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Hawai'i
Sept. 6	Weber State
Sept. 12	Kansas State
Sept. 27	at Iowa State
Oct. 4	Oklahoma State
Oct. 11	BYU
Oct. 18	at Houston
Nov. 1	at Colorado
Nov. 8	Kansas
Nov. 15	at Cincinnati
Nov. 22	Baylor
Nov. 28	at Arizona State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Isaiah Mizell, WR	★★★★
2.	Kellan Ford, TE	★★★
3.	Gio Richardson, WR	★★★
4.	Louis Akpa, OT	★★★
5.	Kason Brown, S	★★★
6.	Myron Robinson, LB	★★★
7.	Swayde Griffin, CB	★★★
8.	Jaxon Griffin, OT	★★★
9.	Zac Siulepa, DL	★★★
10.	Elijah Brown, CB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Brennan • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 38-56 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Seth Doege • Defensive Coordinator: Danny Gonzales • Location: Tucson, Ariz. • Stadium: Arizona Stadium (50,782)

NOAH FIFITA

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"It looks like they're on the decline. It was a tough ask for anyone to keep that level of success Jedd [Fisch] built at the end, but they've lost a ton of guys over the last two seasons. Their best player [Tetairoa McMillan] is gone to the NFL, and [Noah] Fifita has a lot of question marks around him. I think the success of this staff will depend on how fast they can find a quarterback who can run this new system. ... They're still portaling in a ton of new faces. I don't think they really have their identity or culture in place yet. Best-case scenario here is that the new offensive system clicks right away, and they can steal a few games."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	12	Tre Spivey III (So.)	18	Brandon Phelps (Fr.)
WR	11	Chris Hunter (Jr.)	6	Javin Whatley (Sr.)
WR	4	Kris Hutson (Sr.)	15	Luke Wysong (Sr.)
LT	59	Rhino Tapa'atoutai (So.)	75	Ty Buchanan (Sr.)
LG	52	Ka'ena Decambra (Sr.)	79	Isaac Perez (Jr.)
C	55	Chubba Ma'ae (Sr.)	50	Ise Matautia (Sr.)
RG	**60**	**ALEXANDER DOOST (SO.)**	70	Zarius Wells (So.)
RT	71	Tristan Bounds (Sr.)	73	Matthew Lado (Fr.)
TE	**84**	**SAM OLSON (SR.)**	87	Tyler Powell (Jr.)
QB	**1**	**NOAH FIFITA (JR.)**	8	Braedyn Locke (Jr.)
RB	3	Kedrick Reescano (Jr.)	21	Ismail Mahdi (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	**3**	**TRE SMITH (SR.)**	90	Chancellor Owens (Jr.)
DT	98	Tiaoalii Savea (Sr.)	93	Jarra Anderson (So.)
DT	99	Deshawn McKnight (Sr.)	95	Leroy Palu (Jr.)
DE	42	Dominic Lolesio (So.)	94	Eduwa Okundaye (Fr.)
ILB	**6**	**TAYE BROWN (JR.)**	4	Max Harris (Sr.)
ILB	16	Riley Wilson (Sr.)	**7**	**CHASE KENNEDY (JR.)**
CB	5	Marquis Groves-Killebrew (Jr.)	11	Ayden Garnes (Sr.)
CB	9	Jay'Vion Cole (Jr.)	25	Michael Dansby (Sr.)
NB	**2**	**TREYDAN STUKES (SR.)**	11	Ayden Garnes (Sr.)
SS	**43**	**DALTON JOHNSON (SR.)**	24	Gavin Hunter (So.)
FS	**12**	**GENESIS SMITH (JR.)**	13	Jack Luttrell (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	19	Michael Salgado-Medina (So.)	KR	6	Javin Whatley (Sr.)
P	19	Michael Salgado-Medina (So.)	PR	2	Jeremiah Patterson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SAM LEAVITT

SCOUTING THE SUN DEVILS

"Our league is very volatile right now so there's an idea another program might jump out of nowhere like these guys did, but it's hard to pick against them as the best right now. They won the league and return almost everybody. ... The Army running back [Kanye Udoh] is not Cam [Skattebo]. Different style, different mentality. You're not looking to replace Cam, you just want the production. [Sam] Leavitt's the man now, and they're going to ask more of him. The position group to watch is the secondary; they were probably the weakest unit last season, and they've portaled in some guys. ... They might not win as many games, but the culture there is rock-solid, and you heard about how the players love their head coach. They're going to be at the top of the league for a while."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	0	**JORDYN TYSON (JR.)**	16	Jaren Hamilton (So.)
WR	12	Malik McClain (Sr.)	5	Noble Johnson (So.)
WR	18	Jalen Moss (Jr.)	83	Derek Eusebio (Jr.)
LT	65	**JOSH ATKINS (SR.)**	56	Jalen Klemm (Jr.)
LG	55	Jimeto Obigbo (Sr.)	74	Sean Na'a (So.)
C	62	**BEN COLEMAN (SR.)**	71	Makua Pule (So.)
RG	77	**KYLE SCOTT (SR.)**	73	Terrell Kim (Fr.)
RT	58	**MAX IHEANACHOR (SO.)**	56	Jalen Klemm (So.)
TE	7	**CHAMON METAYER (SR.)**	85	Cameron Harpole (Sr.)
QB	10	**SAM LEAVITT (SO.)**	2	Jeff Sims (Sr..)
RB	2	Kyson Brown (Jr.)	3	Raleek Brown (Jr.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	10	**CLAYTON SMITH (SR.)**	95	Justin Wodtly (Sr.)
DT	99	**C.J. FITE (JR.)**	98	Jacob Rich Kongaika (Sr.)
DT	92	Zac Swanson (Jr.)	93	My'Keil Gardner (So.)
DE	32	**PRINCE DORBAH (SR.)**	15	Elijah O'Neal (Sr.)
LB	44	**KEYSHAUN ELLIOTT (SR.)**	30	Zyrus Fiaseu (Sr.)
LB	8	**JORDAN CROOK (SR.)**	18	Martell Hughes (So.)
CB	1	**KEITH ABNEY II (JR.)**	17	Rodney Bimage Jr. (Fr.)
CB	12	**JAVAN ROBINSON (JR.)**	23	Nyland Green (Sr.)
NB	20	Kyndrich Breedlove (Sr.)	9	Montana Warren (So.)
SS	4	**MYLES ROWSER (SR.)**	5	Adrian Wilson (So.)
FS	2	**XAVION ALFORD (JR.)**	9	Montana Warren (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Jesus Gomez (Sr.)	PR	3	Raleek Brown (Jr.)
P	31	Kanyon Floyd (So.)	KR	18	Jalen Moss (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 14 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE Marcus Arroyo, the only offensive coordinator nominated for the 2024 Broyles Award, welcomes back four starting linemen as well as all-conference tight end Chamon Metayer, Big 12 Offensive Newcomer of the Year Jordyn Tyson and Big 12 Offensive Freshman of the Year Sam Leavitt. Even without running back Cam Skattebo, the Sun Devils should remain balanced and relatively mistake-free after tying for third nationally last season in fewest turnovers with nine.

Leavitt is the triggerman of an offense with big-play potential. Tyson's 1,101 receiving yards from a year ago were supplemented via the addition of several transfer portal wideouts, including Jalen Moss, who had 1,269 receiving yards in two seasons at Fresno State, and Jaren Hamilton, an Alabama transfer with enough speed to go by the nickname "Turbo."

Kyson Brown, Skattebo's top backup last season, will share backfield duties with Raleek Brown, a twitchy athlete who barely played last season due to injury, and Army import Kanye Udoh, a 1,100-yard rusher in 2024.

DEFENSE Nine starters return to a defense that finished atop the Big 12 in run-stuffing a year ago and has aspirations of dominance under third-year coordinator Brian Ward. Such aims appear highly achievable with a unit led by three 2024 all-conference performers: safety Xavion Alford, a vocal leader; defensive tackle C.J. Fite; and linebacker Keyshaun Elliott.

Replacing defensive team MVP Shamari Simmons at nickel will be the biggest challenge, with Purdue senior transfer Kyndrich Breedlove expected to fill the role. The rest of the secondary, including leading tackler Myles "Ghost" Rowser at strong safety and cornerbacks Keith Abney II and Javan Robinson, should benefit from improved size and strength.

If senior Clayton Smith, who had 12 quarterback hurries last season, and others up front can convert more of those opportunities into sacks, ASU could boast one of the most well-rounded defenses in the country.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Jesus Gomez arrives from Eastern Michigan to lessen head coach Kenny Dillingham's tendency to keep his offense on the field in fourth-down situations. Sophomore punter Kanyon Floyd will be asked to show improvement in field-flipping and pin-punt situations.

FINAL ANALYSIS After being picked to finish last ahead of their debut Big 12 season a year ago, the Sun Devils will be among the league's favorites due to the return of most of their starters, many of their top backups and their entire coaching staff. With one of the nation's best defenses on paper and a quarterback garnering Heisman Trophy buzz, anything less than another excellent season will be viewed as a disappointment by ASU fans.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 7-2 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Wyoming	W	48-7
Sept. 7	Mississippi State	W	30-23
Sept. 12	at Texas State	W	31-28
Sept. 21	at Texas Tech	L	22-30
Oct. 5	Kansas	W	35-31
Oct. 11	Utah	W	27-19
Oct. 19	at Cincinnati	L	14-24
Nov. 2	at Oklahoma State	W	42-21
Nov. 9	UCF	W	35-31
Nov. 16	at Kansas State	W	24-14
Nov. 23	BYU	W	28-23
Nov. 30	at Arizona	W	49-7
Dec. 7	vs. Iowa State #	W	45-19
Jan. 1	vs. Texas % (ot)	L	31-39

#Arlington %Peach Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Northern Arizona
Sept. 6	at Mississippi State
Sept. 13	Texas State
Sept. 20	at Baylor
Sept. 26	TCU
Oct. 11	at Utah
Oct. 18	Texas Tech
Oct. 25	Houston
Nov. 1	at Iowa State
Nov. 15	West Virginia
Nov. 22	at Colorado
Nov. 28	Arizona

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	AJ Ia, TE	★★★★
2.	Cameron Dyer, ATH	★★★
3.	Manamo'ui Muti, OT	★★★
4.	Demarius Robinson, RB	★★★
5.	Harry Hassmann, WR	★★★
6.	Uriah Neloms, WR	★★★
7.	Maki Stewart, IOL	★★★
8.	Daeshon Morgan, DL	★★★
9.	Ben Alefaio-Lilii, S	★★★
10.	Joseph Smith, CB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kenny Dillingham • Record at School: 14-12 (2 years)
Career Record: 14-12 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Marcus Arroyo
Defensive Coordinator: Brian Ward • Location: Tempe, Ariz.
Stadium: Mountain America Stadium (53,599)

BAYLOR BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 29 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE Baylor's attack, which ranked 20th in the country in total offense in 2024, carried it to a late-season surge. With a bevy of key returners, the offense will once again bear the majority of the load for the Bears.

Quarterback Sawyer Robertson developed into one of the best signal-callers in the country. Despite not starting the first two games of the season, he threw for 3,071 yards, 28 touchdowns and eight interceptions and ranked 14th in the county in passing efficiency.

Receiver Josh Cameron, a former walk-on, caught 10 touchdowns, the 10th-most in a single season in school history, making him the first Baylor pass-catcher with double-digit TDs since 2021.

Bryson Washington had the best season of any freshman running back in Baylor history, rushing for 1,028 yards and 12 touchdowns, while Dawson Pendergrass went for 671 yards and six scores. That four of five offensive linemen return from one of the best groups in the country only adds to the heightened expectations.

DEFENSE Baylor's defense ranked in the bottom half of the league in just about every category. Head coach Dave Aranda will remain the defensive play-caller for the second year in a row, and the Bears went hard in the transfer portal to improve.

Calvin Simpson-Hunt, an Ohio State transfer, brings elite size and strength to the cornerbacks, while Northwestern transfer Devin Turner adds a ball hawk to the safeties group. Oregon transfer Emar'rion Winston looks poised to become the next great Baylor edge rusher, and Travion Barnes, an All-Conference USA player at FIU, steps in at linebacker.

In the middle of it all remains Keaton Thomas, who had one of the best defensive seasons in Baylor history, finishing with 114 tackles, seven tackles for a loss, 2.5 sacks, three QB hurries and an interception that he returned 35 yards for a touchdown.

SPECIALISTS Punter Palmer Williams was a weapon for Baylor, finishing with a school-record 49.4-yard average on 43 punts, which also ranked among the best in the nation. The Bears signed true freshman Rhett Armstrong, one of the best in the country, to handle the placekicking duties. Cameron was a second-team All-American as a punt returner, averaging 20.7 yards per return, with a long of 73.

FINAL ANALYSIS After successfully getting himself off the hot seat last season, Aranda needs to show that he can win games with his guys and his system. The Bears have all the experienced pieces to push for a Big 12 championship or more. Living up to the lofty expectations they created for themselves will be a different challenge entirely.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Tarleton	W	45-3
Sept. 7	at Utah	L	12-23
Sept. 14	Air Force	W	31-3
Sept. 21	at Colorado (ot)	L	31-38
Sept. 28	BYU	L	28-34
Oct. 5	at Iowa State	L	21-43
Oct. 19	at Texas Tech	W	59-35
Oct. 26	Oklahoma State	W	38-28
Nov. 2	TCU	W	37-34
Nov. 16	at West Virginia	W	49-35
Nov. 23	at Houston	W	20-10
Nov. 30	Kansas	W	45-17
Dec. 31	vs. LSU #	L	31-44

#Texas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Auburn
Sept. 6	at SMU
Sept. 13	Samford
Sept. 20	Arizona State
Sept. 27	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 4	Kansas State
Oct. 18	at TCU
Oct. 25	at Cincinnati
Nov. 1	UCF
Nov. 15	Utah
Nov. 22	at Arizona
Nov. 29	Houston

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kaleb Burns, LB	★★★★
2.	Michael Turner, RB	★★★★
3.	Kamauryn Morgan, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Caden Knighten, RB	★★★★
5.	Demetrius Brisbon, S	★★★
6.	Jackson Blackwell, DL	★★★
7.	Leo Almanza Jr., S	★★★
8.	Edward Griffin, QB	★★★
9.	Taz Williams Jr., WR	★★★
10.	Bo Onu, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Aranda • Record at School: 31-30 (5 years)
Career Record: 31-30 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jake Spavital
Defensive Coordinator: Matt Powledge • Location: Waco, Texas
Stadium: McLane Stadium (45,140)

BRYSON WASHINGTON (LEFT) AND SAWYER ROBERTSON

SCOUTING THE BEARS

"The offense clicked, and it turned them around completely last season. They'll go as far as they can with that backfield [Sawyer Roberston and Bryson Washington] and could be one of the best offenses in the nation this season. [Jake] Spavital is a great fit there, and they can recruit the state really effectively using that scheme. ... Defensively, they were a mess even with Dave [Aranda] calling it, but they've turned over the personnel and some of the assistants. ... This program is a good example of the shift going on in college football. They stuck with the coach and put the resources into a team GM and focused on NIL, and they're seeing results. They could turn the corner and compete for the league title this season."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	34	**JOSH CAMERON (SR.)**	83	Jadon Porter (So.)
WR	6	**ASHTYN HAWKINS (SR.)**	19	Kole Wilson (Sr.)
WR	16	Kobe Prentice (Sr.)	88	Taz Williams Jr. (Fr.)
LT	69	**SIDNEY FUGAR (SR.)**	77	Colton Thomasson (So.)
LG	62	**RYAN LENGYEL (SR.)**	64	Ka'Marii Landers (Jr.)
C	72	**COLETON PRICE (JR.)**	66	Koltin Sieracki (Fr.)
RG	74	Kaden Sieracki (Jr.)	78	Joe Crocker (So.)
RT	68	**OMAR AIGBEDION (SR.)**	57	Wes Tucker (So.)
TE	1	Michael Trigg (Sr.)	12	Kelsey Johnson (Jr.)
QB	13	**SAWYER ROBERTSON (SR.)**	11	Walker White (Fr.)
RB	30	**BRYSON WASHINGTON (SO.)**	35	Dawson Pendergrass (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	0	**JACKIE MARSHALL (SR.)**	53	Ronnie Mageo (Jr.)
DT	88	Samu Taumanupepe (So.)	93	DK Kalu (So.)
DE	97	Cooper Lanz (Sr.)	59	Devonte Tezino (Jr.)
OLB	40	Kyler Jordan (Jr.)	50	Matthew Fobbs-White (Jr.)
LB	11	**KEATON THOMAS (JR.)**	45	Kyland Reed (So.)
LB	36	Travion Barnes (Sr.)	42	Jeremy Evans (Jr.)
OLB	32	Emar'rion Winston (Jr.)	52	Corey Kelly (So.)
CB	28	Calvin Simpson-Hunt (So.)	27	Tevin Williams III (Sr.)
CB	8	**CADEN JENKINS (JR.)**	25	LeVar Thornton Jr. (So.)
STAR	15	**CARL WILLIAMS IV (JR.)**	16	Kendrick Simpkins (Sr.)
SS	13	Devin Turner (Sr.)	33	DJ Coleman (Jr.)
FS	3	**DEVYN BOBBY (SR.)**	29	Kris Wokomah (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Rhett Armstrong (Fr.)	KR	34	Josh Cameron (Sr.)
P	94	Palmer Williams (Jr.)	PR	34	Josh Cameron (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TROY TAORMINA-IMAGN IMAGES

JAKE RETZLAFF

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"This is a physical defense that gives you real problems. I think they're successful because they're a development culture, and that culture is contact and aggression. Their style runs counter to the offensive mentality of the league really well, and they embrace contact. It's a hard place to play when you're on the road, too. ... They could've played in and won the championship last year. I think they'll be right back there in the hunt with [Jake] Retzlaff. If he can take that next step and refine the decision-making, they're going to be really hard to beat. If there's a weakness, it might be their offensive line. ... Picking up all the Utah guys in the portal was a pretty big statement for them. I think they're a legit power in this league."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	2	**CHASE ROBERTS (SR.)**	11	Parker Kingston (Jr.)
WR	13	JoJo Phillips (So.)	0	Tei Nacua (Fr.)
WR	18	Cody Hagen (So.)	15	Lamason Waller III (Fr.)
LT	71	Isaiah Jatta (Sr.)	77	Jake Griffin (So.)
LG	61	**WEYLIN LAPUAHO (SR.)**	64	Kyle Sfarcioc (Jr.)
C	63	Bruce Mitchell (Jr.)	67	Trevor Pay (Fr.)
RG	51	Sonny Makasini (Jr.)	72	Joe Brown (Fr.)
RT	75	Andrew Gentry (Jr.)	55	**AUSTIN LEAUSA (JR.)**
TE	20	Carsen Ryan (Sr.)	87	Ethan Erickson (Sr.)
QB	12	**JAKE RETZLAFF (SR.)**	3	McCae Hillstead (So.)
RB	4	**LJ MARTIN (JR.)**	30	Sione Moa (So.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	48	Bodie Schoonover (Jr.)	45	Viliami Po'uha (So.)
NT	55	John Taumoepeau (Sr.)	95	Luke To'omalatai (Sr.)
DT	57	Keanu Tanuvasa (Jr.)	55	John Taumoepeau (Sr.)
DE	59	Logan Lutui (Sr.)	13	Tausili Akana (So.)
OLB	17	**JACK KELLY (SR.)**	30	Miles Hall (So.)
MLB	54	Siale Esera (So.)	18	Ace Kaufusi (So.)
OLB	16	**ISAIAH GLASKER (JR.)**	33	Choé Bryant-Strother (Sr.)
CB	4	Mory Bamba (Sr.)	32	Marcus McKenzie (So.)
CB	0	Evan Johnson (Jr.)	2	Jonathan Kabeya (So.)
SS	3	Raider Damuni (Jr.)	22	Tommy Prassas (So.)
FS	28	**TANNER WALL (SR.)**	10	Faletau Satuala (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	44	Will Ferrin (Sr.)	KR 89	Dominique McKenzie (Fr.)
P	35	Sam Vander Haar (Jr.)	PR 11	Parker Kingston (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BYU COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 30 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 11-2, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE Jake Retzlaff drew national attention last fall for being the first Jewish quarterback in BYU history. Perhaps lost in the headlines was the fact that the 22-year-old Retzlaff improved immensely on the field, leading BYU to an 11-2 season and Alamo Bowl victory over Colorado.

Retzlaff wasn't perfect, completing only 57.9% of his passes for 2,947 yards and 20 touchdowns, with 12 interceptions. But he did add another element to the attack — the ability to run with the football, picking up 536 yards (before sacks).

More of the same is expected in 2025, as BYU returns some weapons, although Keelan Marion entered the transfer portal in April and leaves a big void in BYU's receivers room. But leading pass-catcher Chase Roberts (52 catches, 854 yards) and leading rusher LJ Martin (137 attempts, 718 yards, seven touchdowns) both return.

If UCLA and Utah transfer Carsen Ryan fills the hole at tight end, offensive coordinator Aaron Roderick's unit could surpass its 2024 numbers.

Under first-year offensive line coach TJ Woods, BYU's O-line improved in 2024. Woods believes his 2025 unit is just as talented, led by transfers Andrew Gentry (Michigan) and Isaiah Jatta (Colorado).

DEFENSE Second-year defensive coordinator Jay Hill continued to work wonders in 2024, two years after the unit seemingly hit rock bottom and caused head coach Kalani Sitake to dismiss longtime DC Ilaisa Tuiaki.

The entire defensive line graduated, but BYU was able to acquire Utah transfer Keanu Tanuvasa to anchor that unit, a move that caused considerable angst in Salt Lake City and celebration in Provo.

The strength of BYU's defense should once again be its linebackers. Jack Kelly leads that group, while playmaking OLB Isaiah Glasker is also considered a future pro. In the secondary, the big question is at cornerback, as three-year starter Jakob Robinson and ball-hawking specialist Marque Collins exhausted their eligibility.

SPECIALISTS Special teams were simply phenomenal for BYU in 2024, as Marion returned kickoffs for touchdowns against Wyoming and Utah, Parker Kingston returned punts for touchdowns against Kansas State and Colorado and kicker Will Ferrin booted a 44-yard field goal to beat Utah in the final seconds. Dominique McKenzie moves into the spot vacated by Marion, who was an All-America kick returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Cougars won't be sneaking up on anyone this year. In fact, some might pick them to finish in the top three in the league, and perhaps in the top 15 in the country. Expectations are that high.

2024 RESULTS (11-2, 7-2 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Southern Illinois	W	41-13
Sept. 6	at SMU	W	18-15
Sept. 14	at Wyoming	W	34-14
Sept. 21	Kansas State	W	38-9
Sept. 28	at Baylor	W	34-28
Oct. 12	Arizona	W	41-19
Oct. 18	Oklahoma State	W	38-35
Oct. 26	at UCF	W	37-24
Nov. 9	at Utah	W	22-21
Nov. 16	Kansas	L	13-17
Nov. 23	at Arizona State	L	23-28
Nov. 30	Houston	W	30-18
Dec. 28	vs. Colorado #	W	36-14

#Alamo Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Portland State
Sept. 6	Stanford
Sept. 20	at East Carolina
Sept. 27	at Colorado
Oct. 3	West Virginia
Oct. 11	at Arizona
Oct. 18	Utah
Oct. 25	at Iowa State
Nov. 8	at Texas Tech
Nov. 15	TCU
Nov. 22	at Cincinnati
Nov. 29	UCF

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jackson Doman, TE	★★★★
2.	McKay Madsen, LB	★★★
3.	Nolan Keeney, QB	★★★
4.	Landon Goff, S	★★★
5.	Lamason Waller III, WR	★★★
6.	Taaniela Makasini, LB	★★★
7.	Andrew Williams, OT	★★★
8.	Blake Bryce, TE	★★★
9.	Siosiua Vete, OT	★★★
10.	Jordyn Criss, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalani Sitake • Record at School: 72-43 (9 years)
Career Record: 72-43 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Aaron Roderick
Defensive Coordinator: Jay Hill • Location: Provo, Utah
Stadium: LaVell Edwards Stadium (62,073)

CINCINNATI BEARCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 61 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE Cincinnati had to find a lot of replacements on offense after the 2024 season. The Bearcats brought back key players like quarterback Brendan Sorsby, tight end Joe Royer and center Gavin Gerhardt, but they lost their three best receivers and star running back from 2024.

Head coach Scott Satterfield and his staff brought in transfer receivers Jeff Caldwell (FCS Lindenwood), Cyrus Allen (Texas A&M) and Caleb Goodie (Colorado State), and all three are expected to play major roles. Goodie and Allen offer a level of speed that Cincinnati hasn't had in multiple seasons, and Caldwell's straight-line speed and 6-foot-5 frame give him one of the more projectable skill sets in the country. Corey Kiner departed for the NFL Draft, leaving UC searching for a bruising running back — and they found one in Wisconsin transfer Tawee Walker.

The Bearcats did a good job filling holes on the offensive line. A pair of transfers — guard Taran Tyo (Ball State) and tackle Joe Cotton (FCS South Dakota) — project as plug-and-play offensive linemen for Cincinnati in 2025. Both chose UC over heavy interest from bigger and more recently successful programs.

DEFENSE Cincinnati brought back key leaders in defensive tackle Dontay Corleone and linebacker Jake Golday, but three safeties left for the draft, and the Bearcats' No. 1 and No. 2 corners departed via the transfer portal.

UC's biggest addition on defense is Coastal Carolina cornerback Matthew McDoom, who was one of the more sought-after corners on the transfer market following last season. Former Tennessee safety Christian Harrison, who can play all three safety spots and even the SAM linebacker position in UC's 3-3-5 scheme, will likely have a big role as well.

Defensive end Jaylon White-McClain joins the fray from Old Dominion and has the prototypical pass-rusher frame. He joins Mikah Coleman and Jalen Hunt, both of whom missed the 2024 season with lower-body injuries. Coleman projects to start opposite White-McClain.

SPECIALISTS Punter Max Fletcher will be taking over for his brother, Mason, and has been living up to expectations thus far. Charlotte transfer Stephen Rusnak joins the Bearcats after making all 36 of his kicks (11 field goals, 25 PATs) in 2024.

FINAL ANALYSIS Cincinnati added some serious talent at receiver and on the offensive line, but success will largely come down to Sorsby and whether he takes a step forward. The overhaul of the defensive back group raises questions, but after two straight years of disappointing results, wholesale change may have been needed. If the Bearcats can get consistent play from their corners and safeties, that could make all the difference.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Towson	W	38-20
Sept. 7	Pitt	L	27-28
Sept. 14	at Miami (Ohio)	W	27-16
Sept. 21	Houston	W	34-0
Sept. 28	at Texas Tech	L	41-44
Oct. 12	at UCF	W	19-13
Oct. 19	Arizona State	W	24-14
Oct. 26	at Colorado	L	23-34
Nov. 9	West Virginia	L	24-31
Nov. 16	at Iowa State	L	17-34
Nov. 23	at Kansas State	L	15-41
Nov. 30	TCU	L	13-20

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	vs. Nebraska #
Sept. 6	Bowling Green
Sept. 13	Northwestern State
Sept. 27	at Kansas
Oct. 4	Iowa State
Oct. 11	UCF
Oct. 18	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 25	Baylor
Nov. 1	at Utah
Nov. 15	Arizona
Nov. 22	BYU
Nov. 29	at TCU

#Kansas City, MO

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Giyahni Kontosis, WR	★★★
2.	Zion Johnson, RB	★★★
3.	Zach Taylor, IOL	★★★
4.	CJ Crite, LB	★★★
5.	Zebulin Kinsey, QB	★★★
6.	Jermaine Jones, CB	★★★
7.	CD McFee, DL	★★★
8.	Kamron Neal, EDGE	★★★
9.	Terrell Holcomb, LB	★★★
10.	Tim Griffin, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Satterfield • Record at School: 8-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 84-64 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brad Glenn • Defensive Coordinator: Tyson Veidt • Location: Cincinnati, Ohio • Stadium: Nippert Stadium (38,088)

BRENDAN SORSBY

SCOUTING THE BEARCATS

"This is a hot-seat job, and they have to show results this season or it's probably done. The school or the AD, or both, locked in Satt [Scott Satterfield] on a big contract, and that's kept him safe, but this is the season they have to show results. ... [Brendan] Sorsby is a good quarterback, not a great one right now. He turns the ball over too much. The Wisconsin back [Tawee Walker] needs to be a replacement-level player for [Corey] Kiner, and that's a pretty big ask. ... They're not far off in terms of the overall talent. The defense looks solid in terms of the guys they brought back, but they faded big time down the stretch last season. They could win one or two of those close games they've been losing the last few years and make a bowl."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	9	Jeff Caldwell (Sr.)	8	Noah Jennings (Jr.)
WR	10	Caleb Goodie (Jr.)	80	Elijah Jones (Fr.)
WR	4	Cyrus Allen (Sr.)	19	Dakarai Anderson (Fr.)
LT	71	Joe Cotton (Jr.)	79	Ethan Green (Jr.)
LG	77	Taran Tyo (Jr.)	66	Xavier Lozowicki (So.)
C	**53**	**GAVIN GERHARDT (SR.)**	50	Evan Tengesdahl (So.)
RG	50	Evan Tengesdahl (So.)	**56**	**DEONDRE BUFORD (SR.)**
RT	72	Nolan Latulippe (Jr.)	56	Deondre Buford (Sr.)
TE	**11**	**JOE ROYER (SR.)**	87	Gavin Grover (So.)
QB	**2**	**BRENDAN SORSBY (JR.)**	5	Samaj Jones (Fr.)
RB	3	Tawee Walker (Sr.)	6	Evan Pryor (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	4	Mikah Coleman (Sr.)	98	Marquaze Parker (So.)
DT	**2**	**DONTAY CORLEONE (SR.)**	90	Jalen Hunt (Sr.)
DE	4	Jaylon White-McClain (Jr.)	**99**	**ROB JACKSON (SR.)**
LB	**11**	**JAKE GOLDAY (SR.)**	17	Brian Simms III (So.)
LB	31	Simeon Coleman (So.)	22	Jonathan Thompson (Jr.)
LB	**49**	**JACK DINGLE (SR.)**	44	Montay Weedon (So.)
CB	0	Matthew McDoom (Sr.)	8	Ormanie Arnold (Jr.)
CB	13	Logan Wilson (Sr.)	3	Kye Stokes (Jr.)
STAR	9	Jiquan Sanks (So.)	46	Antwan Peek Jr. (Jr.)
S	5	Christian Harrison (Jr.)	10	Tayden Barnes (So.)
S	36	Xavier Williams (Sr.)	6	Trevon Gola-Callard (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Stephen Rusnak (Sr.)	KR	13	Logan Wilson (Sr.)
P	30	Max Fletcher (Jr.)	PR	8	Noah Jennings (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

REESE STRICKLAND-IMAGN IMAGES

DRE'LON MILLER

RON CHENOY-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BUFFALOES

"It's still a circus. That's not an insult to Deion [Sanders], but it is. They've turned over a ton in the portal, and they're trying to make it out like it's a competition-based result, but they're really going to struggle on the offensive line because of transfers again. It will be interesting to see how Deion manages the culture here. This is a roster with big holes and a lot of questions. ... [Kaidon] Salter is a good fit for the stuff they ran last year, and they have a lot of good transfer wideouts. ... [Travis] Hunter is so good, he overshadowed a really good position group in the secondary. Right now, that is their strength. If they can rework the front, the defense might be better overall. ... With his sons gone, this is the year you really wonder what Deion's long-term plan is."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	4	Omarion Miller (Jr.)	14	Quanell Farrakhan Jr. (Fr.)
WR	8	Joseph Williams (So.)	18	Kam Mikell (Fr.)
WR	6	Dre'lon Miller (So.)	9	Sincere Brown (Sr.)
LT	**77**	**JORDAN SEATON (SO.)**	57	Mana Taimani (Sr.)
LG	72	Zylon Crisler (Sr.)	**56**	**TYLER BROWN (SR.)**
C	58	Zarian McGill (Sr.)	52	Cash Cleveland (So.)
RG	74	Aki Ogunbiyi (Sr.)	75	Zack Owens (So.)
RT	71	Xavier Hill (Sr.)	**54**	**PHILLIP HOUSTON (SR.)**
TE	85	Zach Atkins (Jr.)	31	Sav'ell Smalls (Sr.)
QB	3	Kaidon Salter (Sr.)	10	Julian Lewis (Fr.)
RB	29	Micah Welch (So.)	7	Dallan Hayden (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	53	Arden Walker (Sr.)	49	Quency Wiggins (Jr.)
NT	90	Jehiem Oatis (Jr.)	99	Gavriel Lightfoot (Sr.)
DT	94	Tavian Coleman (Sr.)	88	Amari McNeill (Sr.)
DE	**93**	**SAMUEL OKUNLOLA (JR.)**	27	Keaten Wade (Sr.)
MLB	37	Martavius French (Sr.)	42	Jeremiah Brown (Sr.)
WLB	50	Reginald Hughes (Sr.)	25	Jaylen Wester (Sr.)
CB	10	Makari Vickers (So.)	5	RJ Johnson (So.)
CB	**8**	**DJ MCKINNEY (JR.)**	29	Ivan Yates (Sr.)
NB	**24**	**PRESTON HODGE (SR.)**	36	Nathaniel Watson (So.)
SS	9	Tawfiq Byard (So.)	28	Ben Finneseth (Sr.)
FS	23	Carter Stoutmire (Jr.)	22	TJ Branch (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	16	Alejandro Mata (Sr.)	KR	15	Quentin Gibson (Fr.)
P	35	Damon Greaves (Jr.)	PR	17	Isaiah Hardge (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

COLORADO BUFFALOES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 50 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE One of the biggest questions for Deion Sanders and Colorado is who will lead the offense in the P.S. (post-Shedeur Sanders) era in Boulder.

Kaidon Salter appears to be the front-runner. The Liberty transfer accounted for 7,950 yards of total offense and 77 total touchdowns as a three-year starter for the Flames. He's also one of the most experienced transfers from the last cycle, and he has the capability to throw 70-yard bombs.

Many critics have said that Coach Prime doesn't recruit high school players. Julian "JuJu" Lewis might have a different opinion. The 5-star quarterback from Carrollton, Georgia, reclassified from the class of 2026 to the class of 2025 to join the stampede at Colorado. Lewis was a two-time finalist for the Gatorade National Player of the Year award.

For Buffaloes offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur, this will be an interchangeable scenario with either Salter or Lewis. Both bring a dual-threat aspect under center. Salter obviously has the edge in experience.

They'll be starting from scratch in the receiver corps with last year's Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter moving on to the NFL.

The ground game gets a boost with Pro Football Hall of Famer Marshall Faulk taking over as RBs coach. Colorado has had the worst ground game in the FBS since Sanders took over, so the offensive line must improve.

DEFENSE One of the most underrated groups in the Big 12 will undergo a few adjustments going into the 2025 season. No Hunter, Cam'Ron Silmon-Craig or Shilo Sanders in the secondary. The heart of the defense will shift to the trenches for the Buffs. Defensive end Arden Walker returns after fighting injuries in 2024. He's joined by transfers Jehiem Oatis and Tavian Coleman as well as Samuel Okunlola in the 4-2-5 hybrid scheme.

Overall, Buffaloes defensive coordinator Robert Livingston will be busy trying to figure out the correct personnel groupings. With losses via the transfer portal and players heading to the pros, they'll have only three returning starters from last season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Alejandro Mata returns for his senior year. The one-time FCS Jackson State transfer is one of the last remaining players who came to Boulder with Coach Prime in 2023. The Buffs also snagged Kansas transfer punter Damon Greaves. Two-way standout Isaiah Hardge takes the punt returner duties, and MaxPreps National High School Football Player of the Year Quentin Gibson will be the primary kickoff returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Buffaloes bid farewell to two program legends in Hunter and Shedeur Sanders. But having two mega-talents contending for the QB job is a clear signal that the Buffs won't go quietly. Conference contention may be out of reach, but Colorado will still be a tough out.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 7-2 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	North Dakota State	W	31-26
Sept. 7	at Nebraska	L	10-28
Sept. 14	at Colorado State	W	28-9
Sept. 21	Baylor (ot)	W	38-31
Sept. 28	at UCF	W	48-21
Oct. 12	Kansas State	L	28-31
Oct. 19	at Arizona	W	34-7
Oct. 26	Cincinnati	W	34-23
Nov. 9	at Texas Tech	W	41-27
Nov. 16	Utah	W	49-24
Nov. 23	vs. Kansas #	L	21-37
Nov. 29	Oklahoma State	W	52-0
Dec. 28	vs. BYU %	L	14-36

#Kansas City, MO %Alamo Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Georgia Tech
Sept. 6	Delaware
Sept. 12	at Houston
Sept. 20	Wyoming
Sept. 27	BYU
Oct. 4	at TCU
Oct. 11	Iowa State
Oct. 25	at Utah
Nov. 1	Arizona
Nov. 8	at West Virginia
Nov. 22	Arizona State
Nov. 29	at Kansas State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Julian Lewis, QB	★★★★
2.	Carde Smith, OT	★★★★
3.	Quentin Gibson, WR	★★★★
4.	Christian Hudson, DL	★★★★
5.	TJ Branch, S	★★★★
6.	Quanell Farrakhan Jr., WR	★★★
7.	Adrian Wilson, WR	★★★
8.	London Merritt, EDGE	★★★
9.	Chauncey Gooden, IOL	★★★
10.	Zayne DeSouza, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Deion Sanders • Record at School: 13-12 (2 years)
Career Record: 40-18 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Pat Shurmur
Defensive Coordinator: Robert Livingston • Location: Boulder, Colo.
Stadium: Folsom Field (50,183)

HOUSTON COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 51 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE Conner Weigman, who spent the past three seasons at Texas A&M, will be asked to inject life into a Houston offense that was among the nation's worst last season. The Cougars ranked near the bottom in scoring offense (14 ppg, 132nd in the FBS), total offense (288.1 ypg, 128th) and passing offense (152.7 ypg, 126th). This offseason, head coach Willie Fritz reunited with Slade Nagle, his offensive coordinator during their successful run at Tulane. A former 5-star recruit, Weigman passed for nearly 2,700 yards and 19 touchdowns in 13 career starts at A&M.

Amare Thomas (UAB) and Harvey Broussard III (Louisiana) join key returners Stephon Johnson and Mekhi Mews at wide receiver, while Dean Connors can be used in multiple roles after a productive three-year career at Rice. He is expected to split time with leading returning rusher Re'Shaun Sanford II (444 yards).

At 6-foot-6 and 257 pounds, tight endTanner Koziol provides a big target and sure hands after recording 94 catches for 839 yards and eight touchdowns at Ball State last season. Five offensive line transfers have combined for 68 career starts and 4,865 snaps at the FBS level.

DEFENSE Houston has some holes to fill with only four returning starters. Defensive coordinator Austin Armstrong was hired away from Florida and plans to implement an aggressive, attacking and physical style. Houston was hit hard by transfers late in the spring with the loss of All-Big 12 safety A.J. Haulcy and cornerback Jeremiah Wilson. This duo combined for nine of the team's 12 interceptions in 2024. Brandon Mack II, who had three sacks, was granted an extra year of eligibility and will be joined on the edge by transfer Eddie Walls III, who had five sacks and 40 quarterback pressures at FIU last season. Strong safety Kentrell Webb and cornerback Latrell McCutchin Sr. return in the secondary, while nose tackle Carlos Allen Jr. is back to anchor the defensive line.

The two projected starters at linebacker are both coming off serious injuries. Corey Platt Jr. tore his Achilles tendon each of the past two seasons. Transfer Jesus Machado was Tulane's leading tackler in 2023 but sat out last season with a knee injury.

SPECIALISTS Transfer Ethan Sanchez hit 35-of-46 field goals in three seasons at Old Dominion. Liam Dougherty will enter his second season as punter after averaging 41.9 yards per attempt last season. Mews is an explosive threat on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Fritz has won at every stop — and it shouldn't be long before he gets Houston back on track. Whether the Cougars qualify for a bowl in 2025 will depend on how improved they are on offense.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-6 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	UNLV	L	7-27
Sept. 7	at Oklahoma	L	12-16
Sept. 14	Rice	W	33-7
Sept. 21	at Cincinnati	L	0-34
Sept. 28	Iowa State	L	0-20
Oct. 4	at TCU	W	30-19
Oct. 19	vs. Kansas #	L	14-42
Oct. 26	Utah	W	17-14
Nov. 2	Kansas State	W	24-19
Nov. 15	at Arizona	L	3-27
Nov. 23	Baylor	L	10-20
Nov. 30	at BYU	L	18-30

#Kansas City, MO

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Stephen F. Austin
Sept. 6	at Rice
Sept. 12	Colorado
Sept. 27	at Oregon State
Oct. 4	Texas Tech
Oct. 11	at Oklahoma State
Oct. 18	Arizona
Oct. 25	at Arizona State
Nov. 1	West Virginia
Nov. 7	at UCF
Nov. 22	TCU
Nov. 29	at Baylor

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Demetris Dean II, IOL	★★★★
2.	Travis Buhake, DL	★★★
3.	Reshad Sterling, EDGE	★★★
4.	Sheldon Rice, EDGE	★★★
5.	Kenzy West, ATH	★★★
6.	DK Mays, DL	★★★
7.	Zaylen Cormier, WR	★★★
8.	Carmello Brooks, DL	★★★
9.	Chance Bryant, EDGE	★★★
10.	Richmond Ugochukwu, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Fritz • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 212-124 (28 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Slade Nagle • Defensive Coordinator: Austin Armstrong • Location: Houston, Texas • Stadium: TDECU Stadium (40,000)

STEPHON JOHNSON

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"It's all about the offense. Willie [Fritz] went back to what he knows, bringing Slade [Nagle] back onto the staff. They grabbed [Conner] Weigman, and they're going to look a lot more like those Tulane systems from a few years ago. They need a great running back to emerge out of the group they've brought in. ... Defensively, they did a lot of stuff really well in the first year, and they've built on that in recruiting. ... It's all about how well they can start on offense. This was the worst O-line in our league. Easy to hassle the QB, not very tough up front. Fritz isn't a guy who rushes anything. I think this year is a step in the right direction, but they're still a year off."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	**STEPHON JOHNSON (SR.)**	3	Harvey Broussard III (Jr.)
WR	0	Amare Thomas (Jr.)	4	Mekhi Mews (Sr.)
WR	18	Koby Young (Fr.)	8	Devan Williams (Jr.)
LT	77	**DAVID NDUKWE (SR.)**	79	Alvin Ebosele (Jr.)
LG	73	Jason Brooks Jr. (Sr.)	70	Larry Crawford (So.)
C	59	**DEMETRIUS HUNTER (JR.)**	66	McKenzie Agnello (Jr.)
RG	74	Matthew Wykoff (Sr.)	65	Cayden Bowie (Fr.)
RT	75	Dalton Merryman (Jr.)	53	Ronnell McLain (Fr.)
TE		Tanner Koziol (Sr.)	87	Luke McGary (Jr.)
QB	1	Conner Weigman (Jr.)	2	**ZEON CHRISS (JR.)**
RB	6	Re'Shaun Sanford II (So.)	44	Dean Connors (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE		Eddie Walls III (Sr.)	49	Darius Washington (Fr.)
NT	5	**CARLOS ALLEN JR. (SR.)**	93	Xavier Stillman (Sr.)
DE	18	Khalil Laufau (Jr.)	41	Zavian Tibbs (Jr.)
JACK	4	**BRANDON MACK II (JR.)**	10	Latreveon McCutchin (Jr.)
MLB		Jesus Machado (Sr.)	36	Jalen Garner (Sr.)
WLB	9	Corey Platt Jr. (So.)	16	Christian Brathwaite (Fr.)
CB	3	JD Rhym (Jr.)	34	Rickey Green (Fr.)
CB	1	**LATRELL MCCUTCHIN SR. (SR.)**	15	Will James (So.)
NB	0	Keionte Scott (Sr.)	22	Marc Stampley II (Sr.)
SS	8	**KENTRELL WEBB (JR.)**	13	C.J. Douglas (Jr.)
FS	6	Jordan Allen (So.)	33	Johnsley Barbas (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Ethan Sanchez (Sr.)	KR	4 Mekhi Mews (Sr.)
P	91	Liam Dougherty (So.)	PR	4 Mekhi Mews (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SEAN THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

ROCCO BECHT

SCOUTING THE CYCLONES

"They really could go to the [Big 12] title game again. Rocco [Becht] is the real deal, and he'll be better this season if they can install those transfer receivers in. They did a great job in the portal placing guys at need positions on offense, especially the ECU WR [Chase Sowell]. The backfield is solid, too. They're a dominant offense. ... They were really banged up at linebacker last year, and they're turning over a lot of the secondary. Defense is the area where they might slip from last season. ... They overachieved a little in '24, but Matt [Campbell] is such a solid program-builder that it's hard to think they'll slide much this year. He's been outspoken publicly about the state of the portal and NIL, but they're also doing a lot of work in that area. They're competing hard."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	4	Xavier Townsend (Jr.)	6	Eli Green (Sr.)
WR	0	Chase Sowell (Jr.)	11	Dominic Overby (Fr.)
WR	16	Daniel Jackson (Sr.)	9	Brett Eskildsen (So.)
LT	75	James Neal (Sr.)	73	Austin Barrett (So.)
LG	70	Trevor Buhr (So.)	65	Garret Rutledge (Fr.)
C	**51**	**BRENDAN BLACK (JR.)**	63	Jim Bonifas (Sr.)
RG	**61**	**DYLAN BARRETT (SR.)**	73	Deylin Hasert (Jr.)
RT	**66**	**TYLER MILLER (SR.)**	50	Tyler Maro (Sr.)
TE	18	Benjamin Brahmer (Jr.)	**84**	**GABE BURKLE (JR.)**
QB	**3**	**ROCCO BECHT (JR.)**	5	Connor Moberly (Fr.)
RB	**26**	**CARSON HANSEN (JR.)**	24	Abu Sama III (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	8	Vontroy Malone (Jr.)		Tamatoa McDonough (Sr.)
NG	**95**	**DOMINIQUE ORANGE (SR.)**		Markell Chapman (So.)
DT	53	Zaimir Hawk (So.)	56	Alijah Carnell (Fr.)
DE	88	Ikenna Ezeogu (Jr.)	55	Jace J. Gilbert (Fr.)
SLB	**23**	**WILL MCLAUGHLIN (JR.)**	34	Beau Goodwin (So.)
MLB	**47**	**KOOPER EBEL (JR.)**	**9**	**CAEL BREZINA (SO.)**
WLB	26	Caleb Bacon (Sr.)	0	Zachary Lovett (Sr.)
CB	**3**	**JONTEZ WILLIAMS (JR.)**	18	David Coffey (Fr.)
CB	21	Tre Bell (Jr.)	5	Beni Ngoyi (So.)
BS	19	Ta'Shawn James (So.)	2	Jamison Patton (Jr.)
FS	**4**	**JEREMIAH COOPER (SR.)**	36	Carson Van Dinter (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Kyle Konrardy (So.)	KR	4 Xavier Townsend (Jr.)
P	80	Tyler Perkins (Sr.)	PR	4 Xavier Townsend (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 23 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE Rocco Becht returns for his junior season and is by every metric already one of the best quarterbacks in program history. The junior has passed for 6,690 yards with 48 touchdowns in three seasons and is viewed as an on-field coach by offensive coordinator Taylor Mouser.

Becht will have to find rhythm with new receivers and improve upon last year's 59.4% completion rate. Stalwarts Jaylin Noel and Jayden Higgins were NFL draftees and two of the best in the sport last year. Key transfers Xavier Townsend (UCF) and Chase Sowell (East Carolina) will be impact targets for Becht. Tight ends Benjamin Brahmer, Gabe Burkle and redshirt freshman Cooper Alexander will all catch a lot of balls.

Running back will be split between juniors Carson Hansen and Abu Sama III. Hansen led the way with 13 rushing touchdowns last season, but the coaching staff still loves the home-run potential that Sama brings.

Iowa State returns 106 total starts among its offensive linemen, including returning starters Brendan Black, Dylan Barrett and Tyler Miller.

DEFENSE Linebacker Caleb Bacon, arguably Iowa State's best defensive player heading into 2024, suffered a season-ending leg injury in the first game of the season. The entire linebacker room had awful injury luck last season, which forced defensive coordinator Jon Heacock to go deep into his bench. Bacon, Kooper Ebel and Will McLaughlin (who also missed most of 2024) headline a talented group of linebackers.

Domonique Orange was one of the most sought-after nose guards in college football last offseason but showed true loyalty to head coach Matt Campbell and the Cyclones. Veterans Jontez Williams (CB) and Jeremiah Cooper (FS) will lead the secondary and are future pros.

The biggest question: What production can the Cyclones expect from four transfer defensive linemen? It is imperative to get to the quarterback more frequently after they tallied only 17 sacks in 14 games last season.

SPECIALISTS Iowa State is in a good spot with situational punters Tyler Perkins and Jace T. Gilbert. Sophomore placekicker Kyle Konrardy returns. Wideout Townsend should be the main man in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS In 2024, Iowa State had what was perhaps the most disastrous season in school history in terms of injuries. Thirteen expected starters missed at least one game. Iowa State still won a school-record 11 games, which included a berth in the Big 12 Championship Game and a Pop-Tarts Bowl victory over Miami (Fla.). With 12 starters returning, there is reason to be optimistic. Expect the Cyclones to be a factor in the Big 12 championship race.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 7-2 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	North Dakota	W	21-3
Sept. 7	at Iowa	W	20-19
Sept. 21	Arkansas State	W	52-7
Sept. 28	at Houston	W	20-0
Oct. 5	Baylor	W	43-21
Oct. 12	at West Virginia	W	28-16
Oct. 19	UCF	W	38-35
Nov. 2	Texas Tech	L	22-23
Nov. 9	vs. Kansas #	L	36-45
Nov. 16	Cincinnati	W	34-17
Nov. 23	at Utah	W	31-28
Nov. 30	Kansas State	W	29-21
Dec. 7	vs. Arizona State %	L	19-45
Dec. 28	vs. Miami (Fla.) &	W	42-41

#Kansas City, MO %Arlington, TX &Pop-Tarts Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	vs. Kansas State #
Aug. 30	South Dakota
Sept. 6	Iowa
Sept. 13	at Arkansas State
Sept. 27	Arizona
Oct. 4	at Cincinnati
Oct. 11	at Colorado
Oct. 25	BYU
Nov. 1	Arizona State
Nov. 8	at TCU
Nov. 22	Kansas
Nov. 29	at Oklahoma State

#Dublin, Ireland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alex Manske, QB	★★★★
2.	Will Tompkins, OT	★★★★
3.	Will Hawthorne, LB	★★★★
4.	Ethan Stecker, ATH	★★★
5.	Mason Ellens, S	★★★
6.	Jack Limbaugh, EDGE	★★★
7.	Kuol Kuol, OT	★★★
8.	Ka'Mori Moore, DL	★★★
9.	Ryver Peppers, RB	★★★
10.	Sione Perkins, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Campbell • Record at School: 64-51 (9 years)
Career Record: 99-66 (13+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Taylor Mouser
Defensive Coordinator: Jon Heacock • Location: Ames, Iowa
Stadium: Jack Trice Stadium (61,500)

KANSAS JAYHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 36 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 4-5 BIG 12

OFFENSE Jalon Daniels looked like the Jalon of old in the second half of the season, keying the Jayhawks' strong close. He should star in the system put forward by co-offensive coordinators Jim Zebrowski and Matt Lubick, which is designed to play to his strengths.

Devin Neal is off to the NFL, but if Daniel Hishaw Jr. can stay healthy, he could be one of the Big 12's best backs. Daniels' targets at receiver and tight end include a number of newcomers, but they could be more dynamic, headlined by Alabama transfer Emmanuel Henderson Jr., who earned high praise through the spring.

The Jayhawks appear set at three of the five offensive line spots with All-Big 12 center Bryce Foster, guard Kobe Baynes and left tackle Calvin Clements, but the battle for the other two spots could rage until opening weekend. Don't overcomplicate it: If Daniels and Hishaw are great, the offense will once again be one of the nation's best.

DEFENSE Expect defensive coordinator D.K. McDonald to simplify things to help out a back seven full of new faces, albeit ones who played extensively at previous stops.

The other thing that should help? A defensive line that may be the strength of the entire team. Dean Miller is back after putting up 10 tackles for a loss last year, and a D.J. Withers/Tommy Dunn Jr. duo could be among the league's best tackle pairings — except that rising star Blake Herold could displace one of them in the starting lineup.

Kansas fared well in the portal at linebacker and defensive back, but how long will it take them to get up to speed?

SPECIALISTS Kansas is replacing its kicker, punter and returners from a year ago, but the Jayhawks hit well in the portal with placekicker Laith Marjan and punter Finn Lappin. The former hit on 16-of-17 field goals at South Alabama a year ago, with the only miss coming from 50 yards. Lappin averaged 46.1 yards per punt last season at FCS McNeese.

FINAL ANALYSIS A year after Kansas entered the season a dark-horse Big 12 title contender only to slump to 5-7, the Jayhawks will open sparkling new facilities with a new-look roster but lower expectations. Don't be surprised if Kansas exceeds those expectations with an explosive offense that gets back to the varied option looks that helped bring the program out of a decade-plus of futility. The defense is a bit more of a wild card but has some intriguing pieces. If a few defensive transfers hit the ground running, the Jayhawks could get off to a torrid start, similar to those that propelled the 2022 and 2023 Kansas squads to breakout seasons.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 4-5 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	vs. Lindenwood #	W	48-3
Sept. 7	at Illinois	L	17-23
Sept. 13	vs. UNLV #	L	20-23
Sept. 21	at West Virginia	L	28-32
Sept. 28	vs. TCU %	L	27-38
Oct. 5	at Arizona State	L	31-35
Oct. 19	vs. Houston %	W	42-14
Oct. 26	at Kansas State	L	27-29
Nov. 9	vs. Iowa State %	W	45-36
Nov. 16	at BYU	W	17-13
Nov. 23	vs. Colorado %	W	37-21
Nov. 30	at Baylor	L	17-45

#Kansas City, KS %Kansas City, MO

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	Fresno State
Aug. 29	Wagner
Sept. 6	Missouri
Sept. 20	West Virginia
Sept. 27	Cincinnati
Oct. 4	at UCF
Oct. 11	at Texas Tech
Oct. 25	Kansas State
Nov. 1	Oklahoma State
Nov. 8	at Arizona
Nov. 22	at Iowa State
Nov. 28	Utah

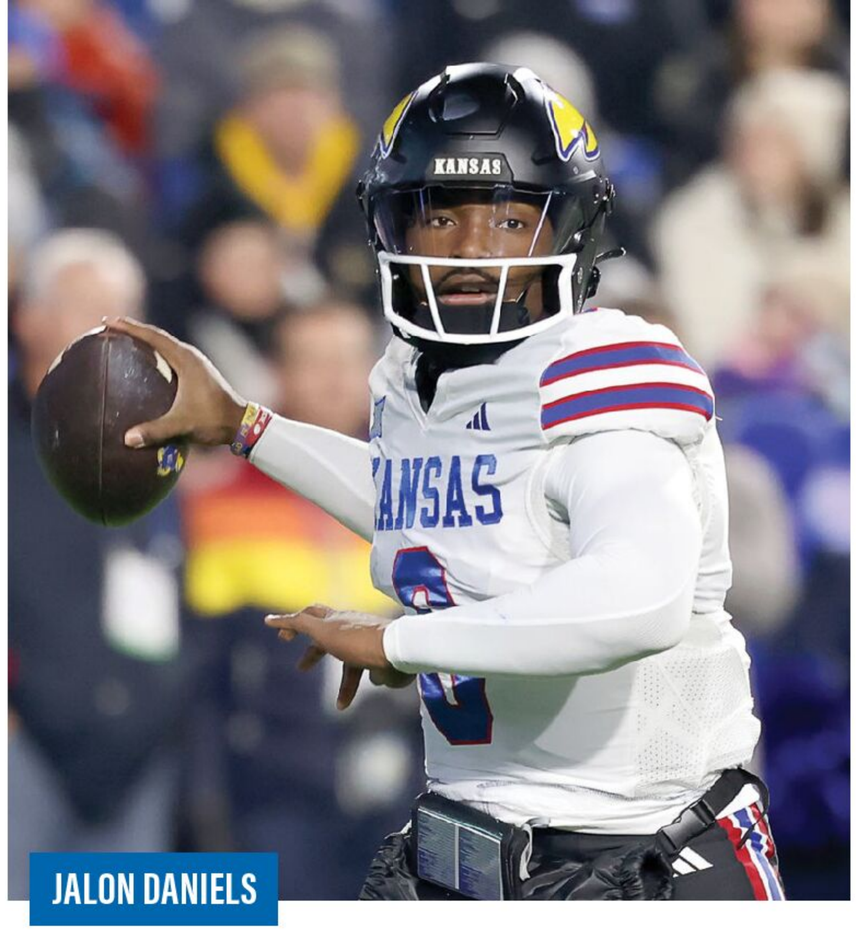
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Chris McCorkle, CB	★★★
2.	Josiah Hammond, EDGE	★★★
3.	Adrian Holley, EDGE	★★★
4.	Malachi Curvey, EDGE	★★★
5.	John Kelly, RB	★★★
6.	David McComb, QB	★★★
7.	Justin Thuman, RB	★★★
8.	Jaden Nickens, WR	★★★
9.	Bryson Hayes, WR	★★★
10.	Jackson Cook, WR	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Leipold • Record at School: 22-28 (4 years) • Career Record: 168-67 (18 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Jim Zebrowski, Matt Lubick • Defensive Coordinator: D.K. McDonald • Location: Lawrence, Kan.
Stadium: David Booth Kansas Memorial Stadium (47,000)



JALON DANIELS

SCOUTING THE JAYHAWKS

"You see a lot of holes when it comes to returning production, but I wouldn't rule out a bigger step forward this season if [Jalon] Daniels is healthy. He's a star player, and they really thrive off of him. On paper, they're not a top-end team in the league; they're replacing a lot at receiver, tight end and linebacker, but this program gets the most out of what they've got. I wouldn't pick against Lance [Leipold] when they're bringing back a veteran quarterback with a really solid line and a good defense. They can run the ball very well, and the Iowa back [Leshon Williams] could fit in really well with what they do. If they can find some receivers coming out of camp, they're going to be a very tough team to play and might surprise some people."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	Emmanuel Henderson Jr. (Sr.)		Bryson Canty (Sr.)
WR	3	Keaton Kubecka (So.)	10	Levi Wentz (Sr.)
WR	5	Doug Emilien (Sr.)	7	Cam Pickett (Jr.)
LT	75	Calvin Clements (So.)	74	Jack Tanner (So.)
LG	54	Tavake Tuikolovatu (So.)	71	James Livingston (Jr.)
C	61	**BRYCE FOSTER (SR.)**	52	Tyler Mercer (So.)
RG	70	**KOBE BAYNES (SR.)**	56	Amir Herring (So.)
RT		Enrique Cruz (Sr.)	59	Nolan Gorczyca (Sr.)
TE	18	DeShawn Hanika (Sr.)	87	Leyton Cure (Sr.)
QB	6	**JALON DANIELS (SR.)**	15	Cole Ballard (So.)
RB	9	Daniel Hishaw Jr. (Sr.)	4	Leshon Williams (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

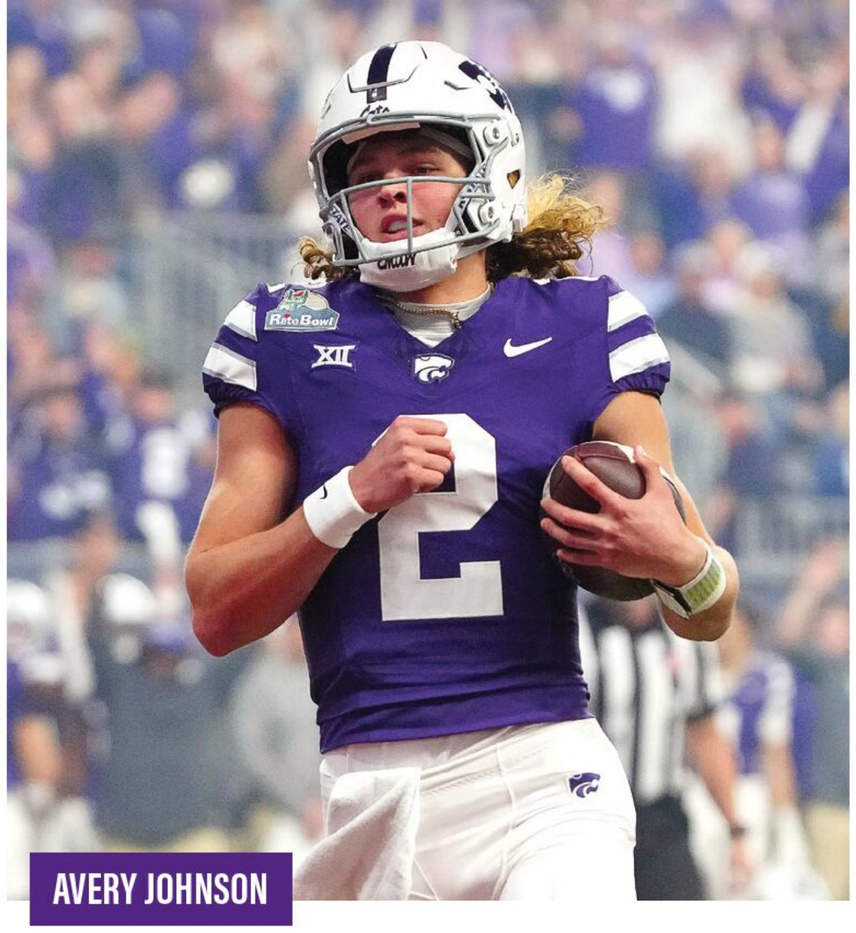
DE	5	**DEAN MILLER (SR.)**	9	Dakyus Brinkley (Fr.)
DT	52	**D.J. WITHERS (SR.)**	99	Gage Keys (Sr.)
DT	92	**TOMMY DUNN JR. (SR.)**	94	Blake Herold (So.)
DE	15	Justice Finkley (Sr.)		Alex Bray (Jr.)
LB	3	Joseph Sipp Jr. (Sr.)	4	Trey Lathan (Jr.)
LB	1	Bangally Kamara (Sr.)	16	Logan Brantley (So.)
LB	10	Jayson Gilliom (Sr.)	8	Jon Jon Kamara (Fr.)
CB	26	Jalen Todd (So.)	6	Jahlil Hurley (So.)
CB	7	DJ Graham II (Sr.)		Syeed Gibbs (Jr.)
S	27	Taylor Davis (So.)	14	Jalen Dye (Sr.)
S	2	Lyrik Rawls (Sr.)	23	Mason Ellis (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Laith Marjan (Sr.)	KR	2	Emmanuel Henderson Jr. (Sr.)
P	35	Finn Lappin (Sr.)	PR	2	Emmanuel Henderson Jr. (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ROB GRAY-IMAGN IMAGES



AVERY JOHNSON

PATRICK BREEN/THE REPUBLIC

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"If they come out of the Ireland game with a win, they're in the driver's seat for the conference championship game. The defense is solid, but the offense could carry them to the playoff. Jayce [Brown] coming back is a huge deal for them. [Matt] Wells is a great quarterbacks coach. I expect them to start scripting a little bit more to take advantage of [Avery] Johnson's athleticism. There's room for some creativity there we haven't seen yet, probably because they were getting the kid acclimated to starting full-time. Avery could be a superstar, a Heisman-level guy, but they've got to build up the talent around him. This could be one of the best and most creative offenses in the country this season if he continues to improve."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	1	**JAYCE BROWN (JR.)**	9	Jacques Spradley-Demps (Fr.)
WR	5	Jerand Bradley (Sr.)	88	Caleb Medford (Sr.)
WR	12	Jaron Tibbs (Jr.)	14	Jemyri Davis (Jr)
LT	59	George Fitzpatrick (Jr.)	70	Gus Hawkins (Fr.)
LG	56	Andrew Leingang (Sr.)	64	Navarro Schunke (Fr.)
C	**75**	**SAM HECHT (SR.)**	55	Kyle Rakers (Fr.)
RG	**69**	**TAYLOR POITIER (SR.)**	77	Amos Talalele (So.)
RT	78	John Pastore (Jr.)	70	Gus Hawkins (Fr.)
TE	**86**	**GARRETT OAKLEY (JR.)**	83	Will Swanson (Sr.)
QB	**2**	**AVERY JOHNSON (JR.)**	7	Jacob Knuth (Jr.)
RB	3	Dylan Edwards (Jr.)	4	Joe Jackson (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	44	Tobi Osunsanmi (Jr.)	15	Jayshawn Ross (Fr.)
DT	**56**	**DAMIAN ILALIO (SR.)**	99	Uso Seumalo (Sr.)
DT	8	Chiddi Obiazor (So.)	39	Travis Bates (Jr.)
DE	52	Ryan Davis (So.)	**47**	**CODY STUFFLEBEAN (SR.)**
LB	**45**	**AUSTIN ROMAINE (JR.)**	35	Gabe Powers (Jr.)
LB	**32**	**DESMOND PURNELL (SR.)**	20	Ralph Ortiz (Jr.)
CB	0	Amarion Fortenberry (So.)	9	Donovan McIntosh (So.)
CB	1	Jayden Rowe (Jr.)	25	Zashon Rich (So.)
S	**7**	**VJ PAYNE (SR.)**	27	Daniel Cobbs (Jr.)
S	6	Qua Moss (Jr.)	36	Jack Fabris (So.)
S	3	Gunner Maldonado (Sr.)	2	Colby McCalister (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	32	Cub Patton (Fr.)	KR	3 Dylan Edwards (Jr.)
P	35	Simon McClannan (So.)	PR	3 Dylan Edwards (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 13 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE Last year was a bit of a rebuilding campaign for Kansas State on the offensive side of the ball. The Wildcats had plenty of stars and firepower but little experience to count on. Now the Wildcats have invested enough to keep those players in place, with the added benefit of playing time under their belt. That should allow them to skirt the untimely, self-inflicted mistakes that hurt them a year ago and kept them from reaching their potential.

Quarterback Avery Johnson is a year older and much more confident. He's a vocal leader and has improved his deep ball. The backfield may be a strength once again thanks to Dylan Edwards and Joe Jackson. The production from the receiver room will depend on how fast transfers Jerand Bradley and Jaron Tibbs can get up to speed, but the upside is there for the duo to complement Jayce Brown, who is an All-Big 12 candidate. All four tight ends who caught touchdowns last year are back.

The question mark is an offensive line that returns the fewest snaps and starts in quite a while.

DEFENSE You'll have a difficult time finding a better defensive line in the Big 12 than the one K-State will deploy. The Wildcats have at least six or seven guys up front who could start for other teams in the conference. It won't be a total shock if Tobi Osunsanmi racks up double-digit sacks. They also may have the best linebacker in the conference in Austin Romaine.

The success of the Kansas State defense will be contingent on the secondary. While VJ Payne could be an All-Big 12 safety, the rest of the defensive backfield is unproven and was a weak link last season. The coaching staff turned the room upside down and transformed it. They'll rely on transfers and young guys at cornerback who have played very little. Payne will be flanked by newcomers at safety.

SPECIALISTS K-State is typically synonymous with elite special teams, and that was far from the case last season. The Wildcats will be dynamic in the return game, but they must replace their placekicker and improve their punt game.

FINAL ANALYSIS A Big 12 championship should be the goal for Kansas State this season. The Wildcats' season gets off to an unusual start, as they play Iowa State over in Dublin, Ireland, in Week 0, play host to a service academy two weeks later and face Arizona on the road on a Friday in Week 3 in their first four games of the year. However, their best players are seasoned veterans with enough experience and talent to compete for a championship.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-4 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Tennessee-Martin	W	41-6
Sept. 7	at Tulane	W	34-27
Sept. 13	Arizona	W	31-7
Sept. 21	at BYU	L	9-38
Sept. 28	Oklahoma State	W	42-20
Oct. 12	at Colorado	W	31-28
Oct. 19	at West Virginia	W	45-18
Oct. 26	Kansas	W	29-27
Nov. 2	at Houston	L	19-24
Nov. 16	Arizona State	L	14-24
Nov. 23	Cincinnati	W	41-15
Nov. 30	at Iowa State	L	21-29
Dec. 26	vs. Rutgers #	W	44-41

#Rate Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	vs. Iowa State #
Aug. 30	North Dakota
Sept. 6	Army
Sept. 12	at Arizona
Sept. 27	UCF
Oct. 4	at Baylor
Oct. 11	TCU
Oct. 25	at Kansas
Nov. 1	Texas Tech
Nov. 15	at Oklahoma State
Nov. 22	at Utah
Nov. 29	Colorado

#Dublin, Ireland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Linkon Cure, TE	★★★★
2.	Larry Porter IV, WR	★★★★
3.	Noah King, CB	★★★★
4.	Brock Heath, IOL	★★★★
5.	Darien Whitaker Jr., LB	★★★
6.	Logan Bartley, S	★★★
7.	Will Kemna, OT	★★★
8.	Martel Jackson, CB	★★★
9.	RJ Collins, CB	★★★
10.	Dominic Mitchell, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chris Klieman • Record at School: 48-28 (6 years)
Career Record: 120-41 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Matt Wells
Defensive Coordinator: Joe Klanderman • Location: Manhattan, Kan.
Stadium: Bill Snyder Family Football Stadium (50,000)

OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 68 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 0-9 BIG 12

OFFENSE A crowded and tight quarterback competition thinned following spring practices, downshifting from four to two and leaving Hauss Hejny and Zane Flores to battle for the job in the fall.

On the bright side, both are viewed as strong candidates to lead the Cowboys to a rebound following the worst season of Mike Gundy's 20-year career. The down side: neither has attempted a pass at the college level. Flores, who took a medical redshirt a year ago, arrived as a promising prospect from Nebraska and is the more polished passer of the two. Hejny, more of a dual threat, transferred from TCU, where he worked with current Cowboys offensive coordinator Doug Meacham.

The development of one — or both — seems mandatory for an offense that returns little proven firepower and stands heavily reliant on transfer portal additions. Only one regular contributor returns on offense — tight end Josh Ford, who caught 10 passes for 92 yards as a true freshman.

Running backs Rodney Fields Jr. and Trent Howland lead an intriguing group that added transfers in Kalib Hicks from Oklahoma and Freddie Brock from Georgia State.

The receiving corps took a major hit when Talyn Shettron suffered a torn ACL in the spring. The offensive line won't feature a player who has ever started a game for the Cowboys.

DEFENSE The defense sits in slightly better shape identifying key players, with three returning regulars, led by cornerback Cam Smith who easily leads the team with 29 starts. Safety Dylan Smith and tackle Iman Oates also return, providing some stability to a unit that is also leaning into transfers to provide significant upgrades.

Linebacker Bryan McCoy was a key portal addition from Akron, where he posted 120 tackles on his way to second-team All-MAC recognition.

The secondary could emerge as a strength, with safeties Cameron Epps and David Kabongo joining Smith after playing key roles late in 2024.

SPECIALISTS Logan Ward made 12-of-17 field-goal tries and 34-of-35 PATs a year ago and also handles kickoff duties. Punter Wes Pahl also returns after averaging 46.4 yards per punt. Auburn transfer Sam Jackson V offers an explosive element in the return game, dazzling in the spring.

FINAL ANALYSIS No team in America may be more reliant on striking gold through the transfer portal than the Cowboys, who could finish with 40 newcomers — or more. Oh, and the coaching staff is new, too, with Gundy cleaning house following last year's 3-9 finish that included an 0-9 mark in the Big 12. Gundy's had a habit of bouncing back, but never has a major rebound seemed so daunting.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 0-9 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	South Dakota State	W	44-20
Sept. 7	Arkansas (ot)	W	39-31
Sept. 14	at Tulsa	W	45-10
Sept. 21	Utah	L	19-22
Sept. 28	at Kansas State	L	20-42
Oct. 5	West Virginia	L	14-38
Oct. 18	at BYU	L	35-38
Oct. 26	at Baylor	L	28-38
Nov. 2	Arizona State	L	21-42
Nov. 9	at TCU	L	13-38
Nov. 23	Texas Tech	L	48-56
Nov. 29	at Colorado	L	0-52

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Tennessee-Martin
Sept. 6	at Oregon
Sept. 19	Tulsa
Sept. 27	Baylor
Oct. 4	at Arizona
Oct. 11	Houston
Oct. 18	Cincinnati
Oct. 25	at Texas Tech
Nov. 1	at Kansas
Nov. 15	Kansas State
Nov. 22	at UCF
Nov. 29	Iowa State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Carl'veon Young, LB	★★★★
2.	Chandavian Bradley, EDGE	★★★
3.	Jotavion Pierce, S	★★★
4.	DJ Dugar, RB	★★★
5.	Michael Riles, EDGE	★★★
6.	Kobi Foreman, CB	★★★
7.	Draden Fullbright, CB	★★★
8.	Royal Capell, WR	★★★
9.	Kameron Powell, WR	★★★
10.	Material Lopez, ATH	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Gundy • Record at School: 169-88 (20 years) • Career Record: 169-88 (20 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Doug Meacham • Defensive Coordinator: Todd Grantham • Location: Stillwater, Okla. • Stadium: Boone Pickens Stadium (52,305)

CAM SMITH

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"No one should count out [Mike] Gundy, but this might be the biggest challenge of his entire run there. They badly misused [Ollie] Gordon [II], they're turning over the entire offensive line, and there's no clear answer at quarterback. But this is Mike's side of the ball, Mike's system, so they're going to be inexperienced, but there's a consistency there. ... Defensively it will be a lot harder. It's all the good and the bad of a [Todd] Grantham defense. They won't be boring to watch, that's for sure. You see a lot of risk and reward with what he does, especially when the personnel isn't fit for that 3-4. Provided they get a quarterback, I wouldn't worry a ton about that offense, but there's a lot of questions here, and it could be another losing year."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	9	Ayo Shotomide-King (Jr.)	81	Da'Wain Lofton (Sr.)
WR	17	Gavin Freeman (Jr.)	18	Sam Jackson V (Sr.)
WR	7	Shamar Rigby (So.)	19	Jaylen Lloyd (Jr.)
LT	77	Noah McKinney (Jr.)	79	Gage Stanaland (So.)
LG	51	Austin Kawecki (Jr.)	70	Jack Endean (So.)
C	52	Kasen Carpenter (So.)	75	Jakobe Sanders (So.)
RG		Bob Schick (Sr.)	66	Louie Canepa (Jr.)
RT	69	Nuku Mafi (Fr.)	71	Tyler Brumfield (Jr.)
TE	40	Josh Ford (So.)	82	Quinton Stewart (Sr.)
QB	4	Hauss Hejny (Fr.)	6	Zane Flores (So.)
RB	20	Rodney Fields Jr. (Fr.)	24	Trent Howland (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	87	DeSean Brown (Jr.)		Wendell Gregory (Fr.)
DT	**99**	**IMAN OATES (SR.)**	71	Aden Kelley (Sr.)
DT		De'Marion Thomas (So.)	56	Sitiveni Havili Kaufusi (Sr.)
DE		Taje McCoy (So.)	88	Landon Dean (Jr.)
OLB	95	Jaleel Johnson (Jr.)	42	Malik Charles (Jr.)
ILB	5	Bryan McCoy (Sr.)	30	Trip White (Jr.)
ILB		Darius Thomas (So.)	6	Brandon Rawls (Sr.)
CB	10	Kale Smith (Sr.)	1	JK Johnson (Sr.)
CB	**3**	**CAM SMITH (SR.)**	2	Jaylin Davies (Sr.)
S	18	David Kabongo (So.)		DeAndre Boykins (So.)
S	7	Cameron Epps (Jr.)	**11**	**DYLAN SMITH (JR.)**

SPECIALISTS

K	19	Logan Ward (Sr.)	KR	18 Sam Jackson V (Sr.)
P	90	Wes Pahl (Sr.)	PR	18 Sam Jackson V (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

JOSH HOOVER

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE HORNED FROGS

"It's crazy to say this about a team who played in the national championship, but this is the season that really matters when it comes to Sonny [Dykes]. They built depth and recruited to fill every deficiency on that five-win team. Now what? They have the best signing classes in the league, and that matters because they're also building NIL to keep the kids they want. [Josh] Hoover is a legit QB, and he should be even better this year if they can replace the production at receiver and find a better running game. ... Defensively, they've been developing some studs. This could be a huge year on that side of the ball for them, and they could be a surprise conference title team."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	1	Eric McAlister (Sr.)	82	Dozie Ezukanma (Fr.)
WR	7	Jordan Dwyer (Jr.)	16	Braylon James (So.)
WR	14	Joseph Manjack IV (Sr.)	4	Jordyn Bailey (So.)
LT	70	Ryan Hughes (Fr.)	54	Quinton Harris (Jr.)
LG	60	Cade Bennett (Sr.)	**62**	**CARSON BRUNO (SR.)**
C	**51**	**COLTIN DEERY (SR.)**	69	Gannon Gaubert (Jr.)
RG	55	Remington Strickland (Sr.)	77	Cooper Powers (So.)
RT	**56**	**BEN TAYLOR-WHITFIELD (JR.)**	75	Rasheed Jackson (Jr.)
TE	0	DJ Rogers (Sr.)	88	Ka'Morreun Pimpton (Jr.)
QB	**10**	**JOSH HOOVER (JR.)**	9	Ken Seals (Sr.)
RB	21	Nate Palmer (Fr.)	6	Trent Battle (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	0	Zach Chapman (So.)	**97**	**PAUL OYEWALE (JR.)**
DT	92	Ansel Din-Mbuh (Jr.)	90	Kelten Mickell (Jr.)
DT	**95**	**MARKIS DEAL (SO.)**	35	Tristan Johnson (Fr.)
EDGE	**11**	**DEVEAN DEAL (SR.)**	10	Jonathan Bax (Jr.)
LB	**4**	**NAMDI OBIAZOR (SR.)**	33	Max Carroll (So.)
LB	3	Kaleb Elarms-Orr (Sr.)	37	Hudson Hooper (So.)
CB	24	Avery Helm (Sr.)	7	Channing Canada (Sr.)
CB	20	Jevon McIver Jr. (Sr.)	26	Vernon Glover (So.)
NB	1	Austin Jordan (Sr.)	18	Kaden McFadden (So.)
S	**21**	**BUD CLARK (SR.)**	22	Jordan Lester (So.)
S	**2**	**JAMEL JOHNSON (JR.)**	19	Kylin Jackson (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	34	Kyle Lemmermann (So.)	KR	3 Major Everhart (Jr.)
P	31	Ethan Craw (Sr.)	PR	14 Joseph Manjack IV (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TCU HORNED FROGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 37 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE The Horned Frogs return the Big 12's leading passer from last season in quarterback Josh Hoover. Hoover set a single-season school record with 3,949 passing yards and threw 27 touchdown passes in his first full season as a starter. Hoover is a gunslinger by nature and isn't afraid to attack defenses vertically. He'll have to do so without three of his top receivers from a year ago, but TCU returns Eric McAlister (762 yards, five touchdowns) and added Jordan Dwyer from FCS Idaho and Joseph Manjack IV from Houston. Dwyer was a 1,000-yard receiver with Idaho and was one of the standouts during TCU's spring camp.

TCU had one of the worst rushing offenses (113.9 ypg) in the country last season despite its offensive line being solid in pass protection. The Horned Frogs are hoping the return of San Diego State transfer Cade Bennett will elevate the offensive line. Nate Palmer is a name to watch at running back. The Horned Frogs should have one of the top scoring offenses in the Big 12 but will need balance if the unit is to elevate to elite status.

DEFENSE TCU enters a second season under defensive coordinator Andy Avalos, and there's optimism the unit will take another step forward. The Horned Frogs allowed 24.6 points per game in Avalos' first season, which was a modest improvement from 2023. The defense began to click down the stretch, allowing 13 or fewer points in four of the final seven games.

The Horned Frogs return All-Big 12 safety Bud Clark, along with senior linebackers Namdi Obiazor and Kaleb Elarms-Orr. Elarms-Orr was an All-Pac-12 linebacker at Cal before transferring to TCU, while Obiazor finished second on the team with 81 tackles. The defensive line adds tackle Ansel Din-Mbuh, who led Washington State with six sacks last season. He joins edge rushers Devean Deal and freshman All-American Zach Chapman.

Based on spring practice, this should be the deepest defense head coach Sonny Dykes has had in Fort Worth.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Kyle Lemmermann had some growing pains as a freshman, making just 68% of his kicks, but he was a top-ranked kicker coming out of high school. Punter Ethan Craw was solid in his first season; opponents returned only six of his 42 punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS With the return of Hoover, Clark and McAlister, TCU has enough firepower on both sides of the ball to compete for a spot in the Big 12 title game. However, the Horned Frogs must improve the rushing attack and bring balance to an offense that was good but not great last season, and the defense must live up to its preseason hype if the Horned Frogs are to be College Football Playoff contenders.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 30	at Stanford	W	34-27
Sept. 7	Long Island	W	45-0
Sept. 14	UCF	L	34-35
Sept. 21	at SMU	L	42-66
Sept. 28	vs. Kansas #	W	38-27
Oct. 4	Houston	L	19-30
Oct. 19	at Utah	W	13-7
Oct. 26	Texas Tech	W	35-34
Nov. 2	at Baylor	L	34-37
Nov. 9	Oklahoma State	W	38-13
Nov. 23	Arizona	W	49-28
Nov. 30	at Cincinnati	W	20-13
Dec. 28	vs. Louisiana %	W	34-3

#Kansas City, MO %New Mexico Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	at North Carolina
Sept. 13	Abilene Christian
Sept. 20	SMU
Sept. 26	at Arizona State
Oct. 4	Colorado
Oct. 11	at Kansas State
Oct. 18	Baylor
Oct. 25	at West Virginia
Nov. 8	Iowa State
Nov. 15	at BYU
Nov. 22	at Houston
Nov. 29	Cincinnati

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kilian Registe, OT	★★★★
2.	Adam Schobel, QB	★★★★
3.	Chad Woodfork, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Terry Shelton, WR	★★★★
5.	Ed Small, ATH	★★★★
6.	Kelten Mickell, DL	★★★
7.	Perry Cole Jr., DL	★★★
8.	Micah Strickland, CB	★★★
9.	Logan Schram, IOL	★★★
10.	Dane Jones, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Dykes • Record at School: 27-13 (3 years)
Career Record: 98-76 (14+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kendal Briles
Defensive Coordinator: Andy Avalos • Location: Fort Worth, Texas
Stadium: Amon G. Carter Stadium (47,000)

TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 22 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5. 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE Former Texas State offensive coordinator Mack Leftwich assumes that same role for the Red Raiders. Leftwich believes that the Red Raiders will challenge defenses vertically with long-limbed receivers Caleb Douglas and Miami (Ohio) transfer Reggie Virgil.

Head coach Joey McGuire is confident that a trio of transfers — North Carolina tackle Howard Sampson, Miami (Ohio) tackle Will Jados and FCS Illinois State guard/tackle Hunter Zambrano — can make up some ground for Tech in the O-line arms race.

A stable of running backs will attempt to replace the program's all-time leading rusher, Tahj Brooks. USC transfer Quinten Joyner rushed for 478 yards and three touchdowns last season for the Trojans, while J'Koby Williams showed twitch and speed unlike any seen in Lubbock in some time.

One of the few constants for the Red Raiders is signal-caller Behren Morton, the third-leading passer in the Big 12 last season.

DEFENSE New defensive coordinator Shiel Wood's primary objective will be to transform a unit that struggled to stop explosive plays (132nd in pass defense) and generate pressure on the quarterback (99th in sacks). The Red Raiders return a couple of key contributors from last year — linebackers Jacob Rodriguez and Ben Roberts. Together, the pair amassed 210 tackles and will be crucial leaders in Wood's revamped unit.

Bolstering the line are a number of transfers — defensive tackles Lee Hunter (UCF) and Skyler Gill-Howard (Northern Illinois) and edge rushers Romello Height (Georgia Tech) and David Bailey (Stanford).

The Red Raiders also addressed their secondary via the portal, adding cornerbacks Brice Pollock (Mississippi State), Tarrion Grant (Purdue), Dontae Balfour (Charlotte) and Amier Boyd (UTEP) and safety Cole Wisniewski (FCS North Dakota State).

SPECIALISTS The kicking duties appear to be secure with the addition of Upton Bellenfant (Buffalo), who converted 18-of-21 field-goal attempts and all 31 of his extra-point attempts last season. Australian senior punter Jack Burgess averaged 42 yards per punt last year. Replacing Drae McCray's return prowess will be a collaborative effort.

FINAL ANALYSIS Expectations for Tech are significantly higher than ever before. There is complete buy-in from the coaching staff and donors, evidenced by the multi-million dollar roster investment through The Matador Club NIL collective, along with the recently opened $242 million Womble Football Center. McGuire's seat is far from hot, but the pressure is certainly going to be ramped up to extremes from the media and fans alike, who are asking this one question: If not now, then when?

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 6-3 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Abilene Christian (ot)	W	52-51
Sept. 7	at Washington State	L	16-37
Sept. 14	North Texas	W	66-21
Sept. 21	Arizona State	W	30-22
Sept. 28	Cincinnati	W	44-41
Oct. 5	at Arizona	W	28-22
Oct. 19	Baylor	L	35-59
Oct. 26	at TCU	L	34-35
Nov. 2	at Iowa State	W	23-22
Nov. 9	Colorado	L	27-41
Nov. 23	at Oklahoma State	W	56-48
Nov. 30	West Virginia	W	52-15
Dec. 27	vs. Arkansas #	L	26-39

#Liberty Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Arkansas-Pine Bluff
Sept. 6	Kent State
Sept. 13	Oregon State
Sept. 20	at Utah
Oct. 4	at Houston
Oct. 11	Kansas
Oct. 18	at Arizona State
Oct. 25	Oklahoma State
Nov. 1	at Kansas State
Nov. 8	BYU
Nov. 15	UCF
Nov. 29	at West Virginia

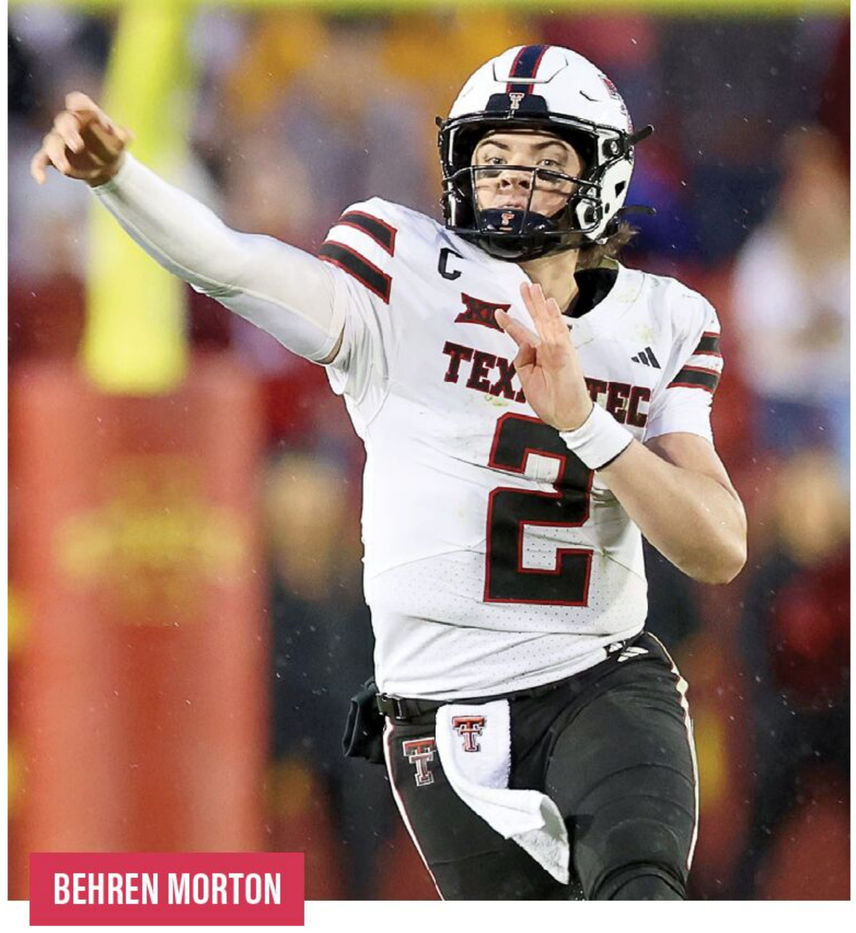
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Michael Dever, WR	★★★★
2.	Danilo Guberinich, IOL	★★★★
3.	Lloyd Jones III, QB	★★★★
4.	Tristian Gentry, WR	★★★★
5.	Leyton Stone, WR	★★★
6.	Deante Lindsay, CB	★★★
7.	Elias Gillen, OT	★★★
8.	Garin Maley, IOL	★★★
9.	Bryson Jones, WR	★★★
10.	Connor Carty, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joey McGuire • Record at School: 23-16 (3 years)
Career Record: 23-16 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mack Leftwich
Defensive Coordinator: Shiel Wood • Location: Lubbock, Texas
Stadium: Jones AT&T Stadium (60,229)



BEHREN MORTON

SCOUTING THE RED RAIDERS

"They're better pretty much everywhere, obviously. But don't assume you can spend your way to a power conference championship in one cycle. Don't get me wrong — all of us would rather have an NIL collective that's throwing a ton of cash instead of the alternative, but there's a lot of questions here. Will [Behren] Morton stay healthy? They didn't bite on Nico [Iamaleava] in the portal, so they believe they've got a high-caliber starter. Can [Shiel] Wood come in and flip the defense with all that free-agency spending? They were a classic Texas Tech defense last year, and that's not a compliment. ... If they're not a double-digit win team this season, it will be considered a failure. It's hard to know if that's fair, or if spending like this is a smart long-term strategy."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	1	Reggie Virgil (Sr.)	11	Tyson Turner (Fr.)
WR	**5**	**CALEB DOUGLAS (SR.)**	4	T.J. West (So.)
WR	**3**	**COY EAKIN (JR.)**	6	Kelby Valsin (So.)
LT	79	Howard Sampson (Jr.)	70	Jacob Ponton (Fr.)
LG	**71**	**VINNY SCIURY (SR.)**	53	Holton Hendrix (Fr.)
C	**72**	**SHERIDAN WILSON (JR.)**	69	Caleb Rodkey (Sr.)
RG	57	Hunter Zambrano (Sr.)	**56**	**DAVION CARTER (SR.)**
RT	76	Will Jados (Sr.)	74	Daniel Sill (So.)
TE	7	Terrance Carter Jr. (Jr.)	9	Johncarlos Miller II (Sr.)
QB	**2**	**BEHREN MORTON (SR.)**	15	Will Hammond (Fr.)
RB	0	Quinten Joyner (So.)	20	J'Koby Williams (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

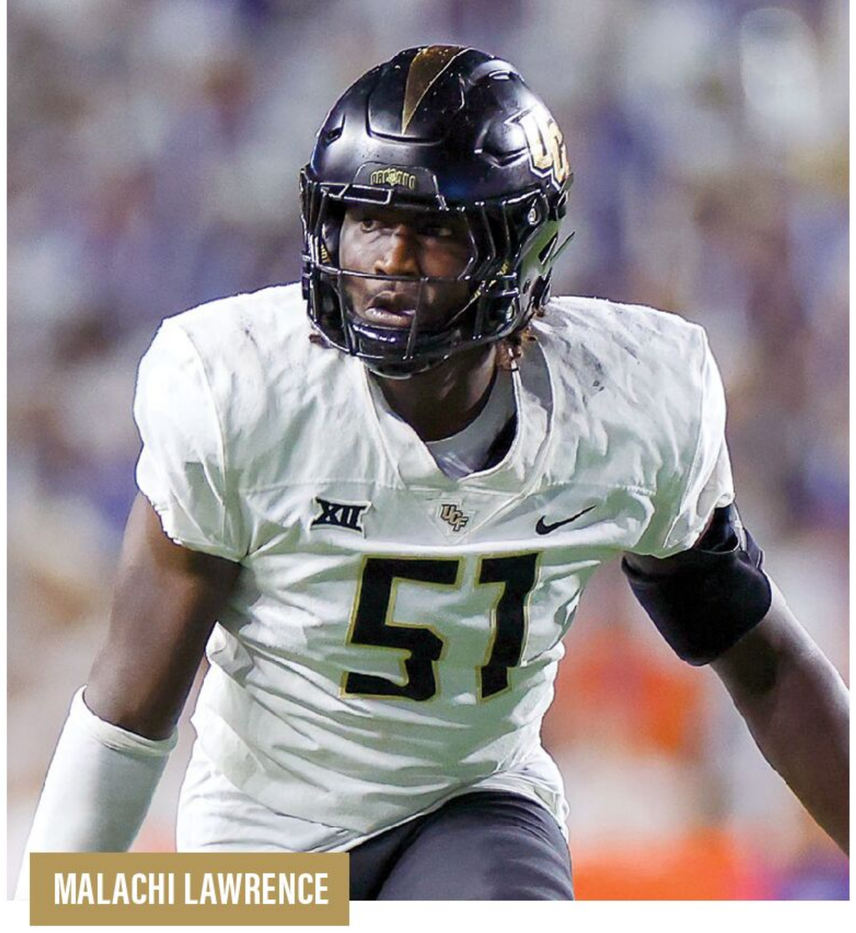
DE	31	David Bailey (Sr.)	94	Braylon Rigsby (So.)
NT	2	Lee Hunter (Sr.)	8	E'Maurion Banks (Sr.)
DT	0	Skyler Gill-Howard (Sr.)	33	Anthony Holmes Jr. (Jr.)
DOG	9	Romello Height (Sr.)	32	Cheta Ofili (Fr.)
MLB	**10**	**JACOB RODRIGUEZ (SR.)**		Bryce Ramirez (Sr.)
WLB	**13**	**BEN ROBERTS (JR.)**	6	John Curry (So.)
CB	19	Brice Pollock (Jr.)	23	Tarrion Grant (So.)
CB	**4**	**MAURION HORN (JR.)**	20	Dontae Balfour (Sr.)
NB	**1**	**A.J. MCCARTY (SR.)**	35	Miquel Dingle Jr. (So.)
SS	7	Brenden Jordan (Jr.)	28	Peyton Morgan (Fr.)
FS	5	Cole Wisniewski (Sr.)	24	Malik Esquerra (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	27	Upton Bellenfant (Jr.)	KR	20	J'Koby Williams (So.)
P	41	Jack Burgess (Sr.)	PR	3	Coy Eakin (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

REESE STRICKLAND-IMAGN IMAGES



MALACHI LAWRENCE

DAVID ROSENBLUM/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

SCOUTING THE KNIGHTS

"Usually, the trend of hiring the former coach back when the program was in a different league doesn't pan out the way boosters think. [Bobby] Petrino coming back to Louisville, for instance. But I think this is a situation where it might be good for both parties. [Scott] Frost and UCF put each other on the map. The talent level is higher in the Big 12, but the personnel and schematic blueprint he used the last time can still work. ... It's going to be an all-new roster by the time we see them on the field, so it's hard to gauge their first year. This will be one of the biggest quarterback competitions in our league entering fall camp. If they lock in the right guy, the first-year adjustment can move a lot quicker, and they can compete for a bowl."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)				
WR	9	DJ Black (Sr.)	8	Bredell Richardson (Fr.)
WR	19	Waden Charles (Fr.)	3	Marcus Burke (Sr.)
WR	7	Duane Thomas Jr. (Jr.)		Chris Domercant (Sr.)
LT	78	Preston Cushman (Jr.)	53	LaParka Langston (Jr.)
LG	64	Gaard Memmelaar (Sr.)		Owen Spell (Jr.)
C	52	Carter Miller (Jr.)	55	Cameron Kinnie (Sr.)
RG	77	Keegan Smith (Sr.)	62	Jabari Brooks (Sr.)
RT	**69**	**PAUL RUBELT (SR.)**		Connor Meadows (Jr.)
TE	0	Dylan Wade (Jr.)	1	Kylan Fox (So.)
QB	2	Tayven Jackson (Jr.)	14	Cam Fancher (Sr.)
RB	22	Myles Montgomery (Sr.)	5	Jaden Nixon (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**51**	**MALACHI LAWRENCE (SR.)**	10	Sincere Edwards (So.)
DT	95	RJ Jackson Jr. (Jr.)	88	Derrick LeBlanc (So.)
DT	55	John Walker (So.)	13	Horace Lockett (Jr.)
DE	**9**	**NYJALIK KELLY (SR.)**	6	Isaiah Nixon (So.)
LB	0	Keli Lawson (Sr.)	43	Cole Kozlowski (Sr.)
LB	20	Lewis Carter (Jr.)		Jayden McDonald (Sr.)
CB		Isaiah Reed (Sr.)	1	Ja'Cari Henderson (Jr.)
CB	29	Jayden Bellamy (Jr.)	5	DJ Bell (Jr.)
NB	4	Braeden Marshall (Jr.)	15	Jyaire Brown (Sr.)
S	2	Phillip Dunnam (Jr.)	17	Jaylen Heyward (So.)
S	**8**	**DEMARI HENDERSON (JR.)**	11	Jaeden Gould (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Noe Ruelas (Sr.)	KR	5 Jaden Nixon (Sr.)
P	32	Michael Carter (Jr.)	PR	5 Jaden Nixon (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

UCF KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 73 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 16 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE There's a three-way quarterback battle brewing in Orlando between Tayven Jackson, Jacurri Brown and Cam Fancher. Brown, the only returner, struggled in two starts last season but has shown improvement under the new coaching staff. Fancher brings the most experience, with three seasons as a starter at Florida Atlantic and Marshall. Jackson, a former Indiana backup, could have the edge, though the competition is expected to continue into fall camp.

After backing up RJ Harvey last season, Myles Montgomery is poised to take over as UCF's lead running back. Western Michigan transfer Jaden Nixon, who rushed for nearly 1,000 yards last season, will push him for the starting role.

Every wide receiver who caught a pass in 2024 is gone due to graduation or the transfer portal, making the position a focal point in recruiting. UCF added DJ Black, a Division II standout from Limestone University; Duane Thomas Jr., a speedster from Charlotte; and Waden Charles, who earned first-team reps during spring as a true freshman.

DEFENSE Edge rusher may be the strength of the defense, led by returning starters Malachi Lawrence and Nyjalik Kelly, who combined for 10.5 sacks in 2024. There's also buzz around Sincere Edwards, a promising transfer from Pitt.

The linebacker group will be heavily reliant on transfers, with a likely rotation of Keli Lawson (Virginia Tech), Lewis Carter (Oklahoma) and Cole Kozlowski, who ranked No. 2 in the FCS with 133 tackles last season at Colgate.

In the secondary, safety Phillip Dunnam (FAU) is expected to make an impact after tallying three interceptions last season. Braeden Marshall is a returning defensive leader at the nickelback position.

SPECIALISTS James Madison transfer Noe Ruelas arrives after making 16-of-20 field-goal attempts in 2024, but competition remains for the punter role, with UCF likely targeting the portal. Nixon also brings experience as a kick returner, having handled those duties throughout his career.

FINAL ANALYSIS After the sudden departure of former head coach Gus Malzahn, UCF welcomed back Scott Frost, who led the Knights to a perfect season in 2017 before leaving for his alma mater Nebraska. Though his Cornhuskers tenure fell far short of expectations, optimism is high for a revival in Orlando.

The defense appears capable of keeping the Knights competitive, but much will depend on quarterback play. If Frost finds answers there, bowl eligibility is within reach. If not, the honeymoon may not last long.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	New Hampshire	W	57-3
Sept. 7	Sam Houston	W	45-14
Sept. 14	at TCU	W	35-34
Sept. 28	Colorado	L	21-48
Oct. 5	at Florida	L	13-24
Oct. 12	Cincinnati	L	13-19
Oct. 19	at Iowa State	L	35-38
Oct. 26	BYU	L	24-37
Nov. 2	Arizona	W	56-12
Nov. 9	at Arizona State	L	31-35
Nov. 23	at West Virginia	L	21-31
Nov. 29	Utah	L	14-28

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Jacksonville State
Sept. 6	North Carolina A&T
Sept. 20	North Carolina
Sept. 27	at Kansas State
Oct. 4	Kansas
Oct. 11	at Cincinnati
Oct. 18	West Virginia
Nov. 1	at Baylor
Nov. 7	Houston
Nov. 15	at Texas Tech
Nov. 22	Oklahoma State
Nov. 29	at BYU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Taevion Swint, RB	★★★★
2.	LaParka Langston, OT	★★★
3.	Ryshawn Perry, DL	★★★
4.	Tony Williams, S	★★★
5.	Malakhi Boone, LB	★★★
6.	Caden Piening, TE	★★★
7.	RaiShaun McHaney, OT	★★★
8.	Rukeem Stroud, CB	★★★
9.	Carl Jenkins Jr., WR	★★★
10.	Camp Lott, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Frost • Record at School: 19-7 (2 years) • Career Record: 35-38 (6+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Steve Cooper • Defensive Coordinator: Alex Grinch • Location: Orlando, Fla. • Stadium: FBC Mortgage Stadium (44,206)

UTAH UTES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 33 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE Utah's offense needed a reset after a disappointing 2024 season, when it ranked near the bottom of the FBS. With changes to the offensive coaching staff — most notably with Jason Beck taking over as coordinator — and an improved roster, Utah is poised for a bounce-back season.

Led by dynamic dual-threat quarterback Devon Dampier, who helped New Mexico rank fourth nationally in total offense last season in Beck's offense, the Utes are looking to put pressure on defenses with a multi-faceted approach to play-calling that will largely start with a strong ground game. Last year, Dampier threw for 2,768 yards and 12 touchdowns (and 12 interceptions) while rushing for 1,166 yards and 19 touchdowns. He has shown progress as a passer, especially in Beck's system and with upgraded talent around him.

Helping Dampier will be an experienced offensive line — anchored by tackles Spencer Fano and Caleb Lomu — and a strong ground game led by Washington State transfer Wayshawn Parker and "Swiss Army knife" Nate Johnson, who returns to Utah after a one-year stint at Vanderbilt.

DEFENSE Even in what could be considered a rebuilding year on the defensive side of the ball after losing so many players to graduation, Utah remains stocked with proven talent at every position group. Utah maintains its stronghold at linebacker, where veterans Lander Barton and Levani Damuni are joined by up-and-coming talent Johnathan Hall to form a formidable group that will be the heartbeat of the Utes' defense.

Add to that Logan Fano at defensive end, Smith Snowden at nickel and Tao Johnson at safety, and Utah can boast veteran playmakers at all levels of the defense.

Utah's top-line talent will be tough to beat, but depth at defensive tackle and corner, specifically, are the biggest areas of concern should injuries arise. But Utah finds a way to counter that notion each season.

SPECIALISTS Dillon Curtis is a breath of fresh air for a Utah team that has struggled of late with consistency in placekicking. The highly ranked kicker has seemingly limitless range and accuracy and should provide the Utes with more options (and points) than in years past. He can also serve as a punter, but Australian Orion Phillips has shown potential, too.

FINAL ANALYSIS Utah has undergone big changes, particularly on offense, that could lift the program back to the upper tier of college football. But with so many new faces, and a lot riding on their immediate success, it remains to be seen whether the Utes are embarking on an upward trajectory. Early signs are positive and point to a bounce-back season.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 2-7 BIG 12)

Aug. 29	Southern Utah	W	49-0
Sept. 7	Baylor	W	23-12
Sept. 14	at Utah State	W	38-21
Sept. 21	at Oklahoma State	W	22-19
Sept. 28	Arizona	L	10-23
Oct. 11	at Arizona State	L	19-27
Oct. 19	TCU	L	7-13
Oct. 26	at Houston	L	14-17
Nov. 9	BYU	L	21-22
Nov. 16	at Colorado	L	24-49
Nov. 23	Iowa State	L	28-31
Nov. 29	at UCF	W	28-14

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at UCLA
Sept. 6	Cal Poly
Sept. 13	at Wyoming
Sept. 20	Texas Tech
Sept. 27	at West Virginia
Oct. 11	Arizona State
Oct. 18	at BYU
Oct. 25	Colorado
Nov. 1	Cincinnati
Nov. 15	at Baylor
Nov. 22	Kansas State
Nov. 28	at Kansas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jason Stokes Jr., CB	★★★★
2.	Cyrus Polu, LB	★★★★
3.	Shelton Fuller, S	★★★★
4.	Bryson Baker, WR	★★★★
5.	Raycine Guillory, RB	★★★
6.	JJ Buchanan, ATH	★★★
7.	Pupu Sepulona, DL	★★★
8.	Byrd Ficklin, QB	★★★
9.	Nate Tilmon, S	★★★
10.	Soren Shinofield, OT	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kyle Whittingham • Record at School: 167-86 (20+ years) • Career Record: 167-86 (20+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jason Beck • Defensive Coordinator: Morgan Scalley • Location: Salt Lake City, Utah
Stadium: Rice-Eccles Stadium (51,444)

LANDER BARTON

SCOUTING THE UTES

"The Big 12 is really hard to forecast. These guys were supposed to dominate last year, and they imploded. There's a lot of questions here, mainly on offense. [Andy] Ludwig and Cam [Rising] are gone, and they're going with a spread and RPO scheme. It's going to look very different than what we're used to from this program. Kyle Whittingham's teams are defined by their physicality, and this is going to be more of a tempo, bang-bang approach to keep pace in the league. ... Defensively, they're replacing a ton, but that's not as concerning. The staff is great, they're consistent and good evaluators and developers of talent. They've got some dudes in that secondary. If the offense can rebound, the defense will find their footing, too."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)					
WR		Larry Simmons (So.)	5	Otto Tia (Sr.)
WR	7	Justin Stevenson (So.)	9	Ryan Davis (Sr.)
WR	6	Daidren Zipperer (So.)	2	Creed Whittemore (So.)
LT	**71**	**CALEB LOMU (SO.)**	76	Zereoue Williams (Sr.)
LG	72	Isaiah Garcia (Fr.)	**73**	**TANOA TOGIAI (SR.)**
C	**68**	**JAREN KUMP (SR.)**	79	Alex Harrison (Sr.)
RG	74	Keith Olson (Jr.)	**52**	**MICHAEL MOKOFISI (SR.)**
RT	**55**	**SPENCER FANO (JR.)**	75	Roger Alderman (So.)
TE	**88**	**DALLEN BENTLEY (SR.)**	10	Hunter Andrews (Fr.)
QB	4	Devon Dampier (Jr.)	11	Isaac Wilson (So.)
RB	1	Wayshawn Parker (So.)	21	NaQuari Rogers (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**0**	**LOGAN FANO (JR.)**	93	Kash Dillon (Fr.)
DT	98	Dallas Vakalahi (So.)	95	Aliki Vimahi (Sr.)
DT	51	Karson Kaufusi (Fr.)	91	Jonah Lea'ea (So.)
DE	40	Paul Fitzgerald (Jr.)	90	John Henry Daley (So.)
LB	**8**	**LANDER BARTON (SR.)**	7	Johnathan Hall (Jr.)
LB	3	Levani Damuni (Sr.)	37	Trey Reynolds (Jr.)
CB	**9**	**ELIJAH DAVIS (JR.)**	29	LaTristan Thompson (Fr.)
CB	4	Don Saunders (Jr.)	10	Blake Cotton (Sr.)
NB	**2**	**SMITH SNOWDEN (JR.)**	29	LaTristan Thompson (Fr.)
S	1	Rabbit Evans (Sr.)	42	Jackson Bennee (Fr.)
S	**5**	**TAO JOHNSON (JR.)**	6	Nate Ritchie (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	17	Dillon Curtis (Fr.)	KR	2	Creed Whittemore (So.)
P	92	Orion Phillips (So.)	PR	2	Creed Whittemore (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ROB GRAY-IMAGN IMAGES

JAHIEM WHITE

BARRY REEGER-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"Rich [Rodriguez] hasn't been shy about expectations going into his first year back. They need to find that group of backfield workhorses for the system to run. A lot of the guys they brought with them from Jacksonville State are at other positions, so the biggest thing to watch is how fast they lock on their ball-carriers and the QB. If that clicks, everything else will adjust quicker. ... I don't think they have the bodies yet on defense, especially up front. They're going to struggle on that side of the ball, unless they can really jump out on offense and keep them off the field. ... This is an adjustment year where they can put in the culture and the scheme. If they can lock in the offensive line and find their next guy in the backfield, they could finish ahead of schedule."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	4	Cam Vaughn (So.)		Justin Smith-Brown (Sr.)
WR	**24**	**RODNEY GALLAGHER III (JR.)**	3	Oran Singleton Jr. (Sr.)
WR	5	Jaden Bray (Sr.)	**29**	**PRESTON FOX (SR.)**
LT	52	Nick Krahe (So.)		Malik Agbo (Jr.)
LG	54	Walter Young Bear (Sr.)	78	Xavier Bausley (Jr.)
C	67	Landen Livingston (Jr.)	63	Robby Martin (Fr.)
RG		Carson Lee (Sr.)	56	Kimo Makane'ole (Sr.)
RT	74	Ty'Kieast Crawford (Sr.)		Mickel Clay (Sr.)
TE	81	Jacob Barrick (Sr.)		Grayson Barnes (Sr.)
QB	8	Nicco Marchiol (Jr.)	13	Jaylen Henderson (Sr.)
RB	1	**JAHIEM WHITE (JR.)**	2	Tye Edwards (Sr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	0	Jimmori Robinson (Sr.)		Eddie Kelly (Sr.)
NG	99	Hammond Russell IV (Sr.)	52	Corey McIntyre Jr. (So.)
DT	**96**	**EDWARD VESTERINEN (SR.)**	92	Asani Redwood (Jr.)
BAN	10	Braden Siders (Sr.)	41	Curtis Jones Jr. (So.)
ILB	35	Reid Carrico (Sr.)	15	Ben Cutter (Jr.)
ILB	30	Chase Wilson (Sr.)		Ben Bogle (Jr.)
CB	3	Michael Coats Jr. (Sr.)	13	Derek Carter Jr. (Sr.)
CB	23	Jason Chambers (Sr.)	2	Devonte Golden-Nelson (Sr.)
NB	5	Fred Perry (Sr.)	6	Jordan Scruggs (Sr.)
S	14	Kekoura Tarnue (Jr.)		Darrian Lewis (Sr.)
S	4	Jordan Walker (Sr.)	7	Israel Boyce (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Kade Hensley (Sr.)	KR 24	Rodney Gallagher III (Jr.)
P	41	Oliver Straw (Sr.)	PR 29	Preston Fox (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 70 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 14 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7. 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE West Virginia will be replacing almost all of the offensive production from last season's 6-7 team. One of the key returning pieces, though, is junior running back Jahiem White, who rushed for 844 yards and seven touchdowns and figures to be a centerpiece in head coach Rich Rodriguez's run-based spread offense, as Rich Rod makes his highly anticipated homecoming.

The Mountaineers must replace Garrett Greene at quarterback and have several players in the mix for the position, including redshirt junior Nicco Marchiol, Texas A&M transfer Jaylen Henderson and Charlotte transfer Max Brown. All of them have starting experience, but Marchiol led the Mountaineers to a pair of wins last season filling in for Greene.

West Virginia returns only 38 catches for 419 yards and three touchdowns from last season, but the staff was active in the portal.

The line must replace its top seven players from a season ago, a critical factor in the offense's development.

DEFENSE Coordinator Zac Alley will run the West Virginia defense after reuniting with Rodriguez. He arrives from Oklahoma, where he built a reputation for his versatile, attacking scheme.

The defense returns some key players up front in Edward Vesterinen, Asani Redwood, Hammond Russell IV and Corey McIntyre Jr., while adding some key pieces out of the transfer portal such as American Athletic Conference Defensive Player of the Year Jimmori Robinson at end. The coaching staff also was able to backfill losses through the transfer portal at every other spot on the roster, giving the defense a chance to surprise. It will come down to how the linebackers and secondary pieces fit together, given how important they are in Alley's scheme.

The Mountaineers might have a lot of new players, but they invested heavily in the defensive staff, which should pay immediate dividends.

SPECIALISTS Australian punter Oliver Straw, the starter for the past three seasons, returns, but the Mountaineers will have a new placekicker. The program brought in Coastal Carolina transfer Kade Hensley to handle the job; he was 16-of-19 on field-goal attempts in 2024.

FINAL ANALYSIS West Virginia experienced plenty of turnover through graduation and the transfer portal, but the coaching staff has been active in filling those needs. The team construction is still a work in progress, but Rodriguez has shown the ability to adapt and build rosters in this new era, given his success at Jacksonville State. The Mountaineers are going to be an enigma for many heading into the season, but this team could surprise considering all of the unknowns.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 5-4 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Penn State	L	12-34
Sept. 7	UAlbany	W	49-14
Sept. 14	at Pitt	L	34-38
Sept. 21	Kansas	W	32-28
Oct. 5	at Oklahoma State	W	38-14
Oct. 12	Iowa State	L	16-28
Oct. 19	Kansas State	L	18-45
Oct. 26	at Arizona	W	31-26
Nov. 9	at Cincinnati	W	31-24
Nov. 16	Baylor	L	35-49
Nov. 23	UCF	W	31-21
Nov. 30	at Texas Tech	L	15-52
Dec. 17	vs. Memphis #	L	37-42

#Frisco Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Robert Morris
Sept. 6	at Ohio
Sept. 13	Pitt
Sept. 20	at Kansas
Sept. 27	Utah
Oct. 3	at BYU
Oct. 18	at UCF
Oct. 25	TCU
Nov. 1	at Houston
Nov. 8	Colorado
Nov. 15	at Arizona State
Nov. 29	Texas Tech

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jalil Hall, WR	★★★★
2.	Taylor Brown, DL	★★★★
3.	Dawayne Galloway Jr., CB	★★★
4.	Evan Powell, DL	★★★
5.	Julien Horton, S	★★★
6.	Michael Hastie, LB	★★★
7.	ChaMarryus Bomar, ATH	★★★
8.	Wilnerson Telemaque, DL	★★★
9.	Tyrell Russell, CB	★★★
10.	Gavin Crawford, IOL	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rich Rodriguez • Record at School: 60-26 (7 years)
Career Record: 190-129-2 (27 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rich Rodriguez
Defensive Coordinator: Zac Alley • Location: Morgantown, W.Va.
Stadium: Mountaineer Field at Milan Puskar Stadium (60,000)

B1G BIG TEN PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS
2. OHIO STATE BUCKEYES
3. OREGON DUCKS
4. MICHIGAN WOLVERINES
5. INDIANA HOOSIERS
6. ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI
7. IOWA HAWKEYES
8. NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS
9. USC TROJANS
10. WASHINGTON HUSKIES
11. MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS
12. RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS
13. WISCONSIN BADGERS
14. MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS
15. UCLA BRUINS
16. NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS
17. MARYLAND TERRAPINS
18. PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP

PENN STATE OVER OHIO STATE

ALL-BIG TEN TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	DREW ALLAR	Penn State
RB	NICHOLAS SINGLETON	Penn State
RB	MAKHI HUGHES	Oregon
AP	KAYTRON ALLEN	Penn State
WR	JEREMIAH SMITH	Ohio State
WR	ELIJAH SARRATT	Indiana
WR	CARNELL TATE	Ohio State
TE	MAX KLARE	Ohio State
C	LOGAN JONES	Iowa
OL	OLAIVAVEGA IOANE	Penn State
OL	J.C. DAVIS	Illinois
OL	RILEY MAHLMAN	Wisconsin
OL	GENNINGS DUNKER	Iowa

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	MIKAIL KAMARA	Indiana
DL	DANI DENNIS-SUTTON	Penn State
DL	MATAYO UIAGALELEI	Oregon
DL	DERRICK MOORE	Michigan
LB	BRYCE BOETTCHER	Oregon
LB	GABE JACAS	Illinois
LB	AIDEN FISHER	Indiana
LB	SONNY STYLES	Ohio State
DB	D'ANGELO PONDS	Indiana
DB	DILLON THIENEMAN	Oregon
DB	CALEB DOWNS	Ohio State
DB	KOI PERICH	Minnesota

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	DOMINIC ZVADA	Michigan
P	RHYS DAKIN	Iowa
KR	KADEN WETJEN	Iowa
PR	KADEN WETJEN	Iowa

BOWL PROJECTIONS

GameAbove Sports:
Rutgers vs. Buffalo

Rate:
Minnesota vs. Baylor

Holiday:
Washington vs. Florida State

Las Vegas:
Nebraska vs. Arizona State

Pinstripe: Indiana vs. Pitt

Alamo: USC vs. Texas Tech

Music City: Illinois vs. Tennessee

Reliaquest: Iowa vs. South Carolina

Cheez-It Citrus:
Michigan vs. Florida

College Football Playoff First Round: Ohio State vs. Boise State

College Football Playoff First Round: Oregon vs. Notre Dame

Cotton (CFP quarterfinals):
Ohio State vs. Kansas State

Rose (CFP quarterfinals):
Penn State vs. Notre Dame

Fiesta (CFP semifinals):
Ohio State vs. Texas

Peach (CFP semifinals):
Penn State vs. Georgia

National Championship:
Penn State vs. Texas

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

INDIANA
Offense: New: Mike Shanahan, Chandler Whitmer; Old: Mike Shanahan, Tino Sunseri

MARYLAND
Offense: New: Pep Hamilton; Old: Josh Gattis, Kevin Sumlin
Defense: New: Ted Monachino, Aazaar Abdul-Rahim
Old: Brian Williams

MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Chip Lindsey; Old: Kirk Campbell

MINNESOTA
Defense: New: Danny Collins, Nick Monroe; Old: Corey Hetherman

NEBRASKA
Offense: New: Dana Holgorsen, Glenn Thomas; Old: Marcus Satterfield, Glenn Thomas
Defense: New: John Butler; Old: Tony White

OHIO STATE
Offense: New: Brian Hartline, Keenan Bailey; Old: Chip Kelly, Brian Hartline
Defense: New: Matt Patricia, Tim Walton
Old: Jim Knowles

PENN STATE
Defense: New: Jim Knowles, Anthony Poindexter; Old: Tom Allen, Anthony Poindexter

PURDUE
Offense: New: Josh Henson; Old: Jason Simmons (interim)
Defense: New: Michael Scherer; Old: Kevin Kane

RUTGERS
Defense: New: Robb Smith, Zach Sparber; Old: Joe Harasymiak

UCLA
Offense: New: Tino Sunseri; Old: Eric Bieniemy

USC
Offense: New: Luke Huard; Old: Josh Henson

WASHINGTON
Offense: New: Jimmie Dougherty; Old: Brennan Carroll
Defense: New: Ryan Walters; Old: Steve Belichick

WISCONSIN
Offense: New: Jeff Grimes; Old: Phil Longo

CALEB DOWNS OHIO STATE
NICO IAMALEAVA, UCLA

FROM LEFT: ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH; ANDREW NELLES / THE TENNESSEAN

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Nico Iamaleava	QB	UCLA	Tennessee
	After a CFP appearance and an NIL holdout, Iamaleava returns to his home state.			
2.	Isaiah World	OL	Oregon	Nevada
	With 35 starts under his belt, World will be tasked with protecting Dante Moore.			
3.	Dillon Thieneman	S	Oregon	Purdue
	Thieneman is a decorated acquisition who reinforces the Ducks' defensive backfield.			
4.	Makhi Hughes	RB	Oregon	Tulane
	Hughes is next up in a long lineage of productive Ducks running backs.			
5.	Fernando Mendoza	QB	Indiana	Cal
	Mendoza will look to follow in Kurtis Rourke's footsteps in Curt Cignetti's offense.			
6.	Tacario Davis	CB	Washington	Arizona
	Davis brings ball-hawking ability and experience to UW's young secondary.			
7.	Mark Gronowski	QB	Iowa	South Dakota State
	Gronowski has the talent to elevate the Hawkeyes' long-suffering offense.			
8.	Trebor Pena	WR	Penn State	Syracuse
	Coming off a career year, Pena is one of three receivers the Nittany Lions added.			
9.	Dane Key	WR	Nebraska	Kentucky
	Key profiles as Dylan Raiola's new No. 1 target with field-stretching capabilities.			
10.	Justice Haynes	RB	Michigan	Alabama
	Haynes should shine in the Wolverines' backfield after a promising start at Bama.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Oregon (4)	7. Washington (25)	13. UCLA (46)
2. Ohio State (5)	8. Wisconsin (27)	14. Michigan State (51)
3. Michigan (6)	9. Rutgers (30)	15. Minnesota (52)
4. Penn State (14)	10. Maryland (32)	16. Indiana (54)
5. USC (15)	11. Iowa (33)	17. Northwestern (66)
6. Nebraska (21)	12. Illinois (44)	18. Purdue (93)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 30	Texas at Ohio State	**Oct. 18**	USC at Notre Dame
Sept. 6	Iowa at Iowa State	**Nov. 1**	Penn State at Ohio State
Sept. 27	Oregon at Penn State	**Nov. 8**	Indiana at Penn State
Oct. 11	Ohio State at Illinois	**Nov. 28**	Nebraska at Iowa
Oct. 11	Michigan at USC	**Nov. 29**	Oregon at Washington
Oct. 11	Indiana at Oregon	**Nov. 29**	Ohio State at Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Bryce Underwood	QB	Michigan	★★★★★+	1
2.	Dakorien Moore	WR	Oregon	★★★★★+	6
3.	Husan Longstreet	QB	USC	★★★★★	12
4.	Quincy Porter	WR	Ohio State	★★★★★	13
5.	Andrew Babalola	OT	Michigan	★★★★★	14
6.	Na'eem Offord	CB	Oregon	★★★★★+	17
7.	Devin Sanchez	CB	Ohio State	★★★★★+	19
8.	Tavien St. Clair	QB	Ohio State	★★★★★+	25
9.	Andrew Olesh	TE	Penn State	★★★★★	29
10.	Trey McNutt	S	Oregon	★★★★★	31

Rankings per On3; +Consensus 5-star prospect

ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI

NATIONAL FORECAST: 17 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 6-3 BIG TEN

OFFENSE How big of a deal was it for quarterback Luke Altmyer to return for his senior season? He announced it on the loudspeaker at a sold-out Illinois basketball game, drawing the loudest ovation of the day.

After an inconsistent first year in 2023, Altmyer morphed into the kind of quarterback head coach Bret Bielema and his staff had hoped for when he transferred from Ole Miss. Touchdowns and yards were up; turnovers were down. The team won 10 games for the first time since 2001.

Protecting Altmyer and clearing holes for the running backs are five returning starters on the line. The best of the bunch is left tackle J.C. Davis, who was granted an extra year of eligibility by the NCAA. Center Josh Kreutz is the ringleader up front.

What was expected to be a four-player rotation at running back was reduced to three in April when Citrus Bowl MVP Josh McCray entered the transfer portal. Juniors Aidan Laughery and Kaden Feagin will split the workload with sophomore Ca'Lil Valentine. Feagin is healthy again after missing half of the 2024 season with a hip injury. There is concern at receiver, where 69% of the 2024 production has moved on to the NFL.

West Virginia transfer Hudson Clement joined the team in the spring and is coming off a 51-catch season. Tanner Arkin returns at tight end.

DEFENSE Coordinator Aaron Henry was all smiles when outside linebacker Gabe Jacas and two-time All-Big Ten Star Xavier Scott decided to put off the NFL. Jacas (8.0 sacks in 2024) is one of the top returning pass-rushers in the Big Ten. To supplement a line hit by graduation, Illinois found help with Wisconsin transfers James Thompson Jr. and Curt Neal.

Linebacker Dylan Rosiek led the team in tackles until suffering a broken leg late in the season. He is ready to pick up where he left off.

Illinois is deep and talented in the secondary with returning starters Scott, Miles Scott, Torrie Cox Jr. and Matthew Bailey.

SPECIALISTS Do-everything Hank Beatty ranks among the nation's top return specialists. David Olano is the latest in a long line of consistent Illinois kickers. He hit 17-of-20 field-goal tries. Australian Keelan Crimmins will punt after ranking among the Big Ten's best in 2024 at Purdue.

FINAL ANALYSIS Going into the season, the Illinois football program is in its best position in more than a generation. Sixteen starters return from a team that beat South Carolina in the Citrus Bowl.

The team should be thinking about the College Football Playoff, but the schedule is an obstacle. Illinois plays a pivotal early game at Duke and later hosts USC and defending national champion Ohio State.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 6-3 BIG TEN)

Aug. 29	Eastern Illinois	W	45-0
Sept. 7	Kansas	W	23-17
Sept. 14	Central Michigan	W	30-9
Sept. 20	at Nebraska (ot)	W	31-24
Sept. 28	at Penn State	L	7-21
Oct. 12	Purdue (ot)	W	50-49
Oct. 19	Michigan	W	21-7
Oct. 26	at Oregon	L	9-38
Nov. 2	Minnesota	L	17-25
Nov. 16	Michigan State	W	38-16
Nov. 23	at Rutgers	W	38-31
Nov. 30	at Northwestern	W	38-28
Dec. 31	vs. South Carolina #	W	21-17

#Citrus Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Western Illinois
Sept. 6	at Duke
Sept. 13	Western Michigan
Sept. 20	at Indiana
Sept. 27	USC
Oct. 4	at Purdue
Oct. 11	Ohio State
Oct. 25	at Washington
Nov. 1	Rutgers
Nov. 15	Maryland
Nov. 22	at Wisconsin
Nov. 29	Northwestern

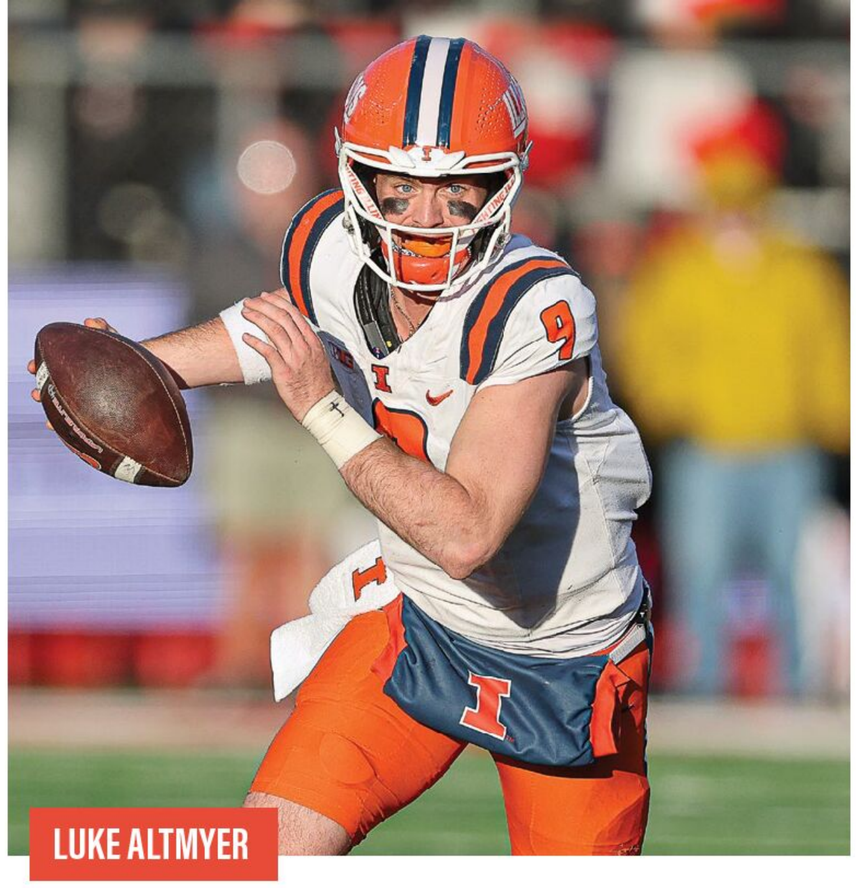
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cedric Wyche II, RB	★★★★
2.	Brayden Trimble, WR	★★★
3.	Grant Beerman, LB	★★★
4.	Desmond Straughton, S	★★★
5.	RJ Jones III, CB	★★★
6.	Ismael Kante, EDGE	★★★
7.	Logan Farrell, TE	★★★
8.	Tywan Cox, S	★★★
9.	John Forster, RB	★★★
10.	Michael McDonough, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bret Bielema • Record at School: 28-22 (4 years) • Career Record: 125-80 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Barry Lunney Jr. • Defensive Coordinator: Aaron Henry • Location: Champaign-Urbana, Ill. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (60,670)



LUKE ALTMYER

SCOUTING THE FIGHTING ILLINI

"I think if they would've made the playoff instead of SMU, they could've made some noise. They're a hard, physical team that's more talented than people realize, and the program has never looked more competent. They have a clear identity from a guy who's been smart enough to hold true to his core ideas but learn from his mistakes. ... They're returning a ton, too, so that gives them a real advantage going into the fall. [Luke] Altmyer doesn't get enough love; that kid has become a great quarterback. ... I think it would be massive for this league if this program could make the playoff. This is proof of concept for a long-term vision of recruiting and developing at a place that isn't Ohio State, Penn State or Michigan, and it's paying off."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	13	Hudson Clement (Jr.)	7	Alexander Capka-Jones (Sr.)
WR	8	Malik Elzy (Jr.)	0	Justin Bowick (Jr.)
WR	80	Hank Beatty (Sr.)	**17**	**COLLIN DIXON (SO.)**
LT	**74**	**J.C. DAVIS (SR.)**	72	Ayden Knapik (Sr.)
LG	**73**	**JOSH GESKY (SR.)**	66	Brandon Hansen (So.)
C	**64**	**JOSH KREUTZ (SR.)**	55	TJ McMillen (So.)
RG	**75**	**BRANDON HENDERSON (JR.)**	63	Dezmond Schuster (Sr.)
RT	**58**	**MELVIN PRIESTLY (SR.)**	79	Zafir Stewart (Fr.)
TE	**85**	**TANNER ARKIN (SR.)**	14	Cole Rusk (Sr.)
QB	**9**	**LUKE ALTMYER (SR.)**	10	Ethan Hampton (Sr.)
RB	**21**	**AIDAN LAUGHERY (JR.)**	3	Kaden Feagin (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DL	90	James Thompson Jr. (Sr.)	52	Pat Farrell (So.)
DT	11	Alex Bray (Jr.)	8	Jeremiah Warren (So.)
DL	99	Curt Neal (Jr.)	92	Gentle Hunt (Sr.)
OLB	**17**	**GABE JACAS (SR.)**	43	Joe Barna (So.)
LB	**28**	**DYLAN ROSIEK (SR.)**	45	Malachi Hood (Jr.)
LB	41	James Kreutz (Jr.)	39	Kenenna Odeluga (Sr.)
OLB	3	Alec Bryant (Sr.)	9	Leon Lowery Jr. (Sr.)
CB	**3**	**TORRIE COX JR. (SR.)**	6	Jaheim Clarke (Jr.)
CB	**1**	**KALEB PATTERSON (JR.)**	24	Vernon Woodward III (Fr.)
STAR	**14**	**XAVIER SCOTT (SR.)**	19	Tyson Rooks (Jr.)
S	**10**	**MILES SCOTT (SR.)**	0	Mac Resetich (Jr.)
S	**7**	**MATTHEW BAILEY (JR.)**	16	Tanner Heckel (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	24	David Olano (Jr.)	KR	80	Hank Beatty (Sr.)
P	40	Keelan Crimmins (Sr.)	PR	80	Hank Beatty (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

VINCENT CARCHIETTA-IMAGN IMAGES

MIKAIL KAMARA

RICH JANZARUK/HERALD-TIMES

SCOUTING THE HOOSIERS

"Maybe the biggest culture change at a program in the history of the sport. IU is a case study for putting your money where your mouth is. They invested heavily in NIL and support. Cig [Curt Cignetti] is a fantastic coach, obviously, but he wouldn't come without that commitment. That's how they succeeded immediately. ... I think they've improved the O-line enough to stay in games against top-level, physical defenses. They're leaning on the portal again in the secondary because they're still a ways off on true, top-end depth for this league. ... Everyone is asking who the next Indiana is, but there's no real reason why it isn't Indiana again. Will they win as many games? Probably not, but they're going to be in the hunt for a playoff spot again."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (4)		
WR	13	**ELIJAH SARRATT (SR.)**	80	Charlie Becker (So.)
WR	3	Omar Cooper Jr. (Jr.)	2	Makai Jackson (Sr.)
WR	7	E.J. Williams Jr. (Sr.)	6	Lebron Bond (Fr.)
LT	65	**CARTER SMITH (JR.)**	61	Baylor Wilkin (Fr.)
LG	62	**DREW EVANS (JR.)**	72	Adedamola Ajani (Fr.)
C	78	Pat Coogan (Sr.)	77	Matt Marek (Fr.)
RG	74	**BRAY LYNCH (JR.)**	70	Austin Leibfried (Fr.)
RT	67	Kahlil Benson (Sr.)	75	Zen Michalski (Sr.)
TE	37	Riley Nowakowski (Sr.)	19	Holden Staes (Sr.)
QB	15	Fernando Mendoza (Jr.)	16	Alberto Mendoza (Fr.)
RB	1	Roman Hemby (Sr.)	29	Lee Beebe Jr. (Jr.)

		DEFENSE (4)		
DE	6	**MIKAIL KAMARA (SR.)**	17	Daniel Ndukwe (So.)
DT	0	Hosea Wheeler (Sr.)	90	J'mari Monette (Jr.)
DT	95	Tyrique Tucker (Jr.)	91	Dominique Ratcliff (Sr.)
DE		Kellan Wyatt (So.)		Stephen Daley (Sr.)
OLB	21	Rolijah Hardy (So.)	40	Quentin Clark (Fr.)
ILB	4	**AIDEN FISHER (SR.)**	46	Isaiah Jones (Jr.)
CB	5	**D'ANGELO PONDS (JR.)**	22	Jamari Sharpe (Jr.)
CB	10	Ryland Gandy (So.)	23	Amariyun Knighten (Jr.)
ROV	24	Bryson Bonds (Sr.)	2	Byron Baldwin Jr. (Fr.)
S	1	**AMARE FERRELL (JR.)**	7	Louis Moore (Sr.)
S	12	Devan Boykin (Sr.)	16	Jah Jah Boyd (Fr.)

		SPECIALISTS		
K	15	Nicolas Radicic (So.)	KR	2 Makai Jackson (Sr.)
P	44	Mitch McCarthy (Sr.)	PR	2 Makai Jackson (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

INDIANA HOOSIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 16 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 11-2, 8-1 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Indiana's path to an eight-win turnaround started when head coach Curt Cignetti opened up his offensive playbook. The Hoosiers set single-season team records with 72 offensive touchdowns and eight 40-point games. Cignetti has to replace quarterbacks coach Tino Sunseri and starting quarterback Kurtis Rourke, but it doesn't hurt that IU signed Fernando Mendoza, the No. 4-ranked transfer quarterback (from Cal), as Rourke's replacement. Mendoza completed 68.7% of his passes behind one of the worst offensive lines in college football.

Mendoza will have more time to throw with IU bringing back three starting linemen and signing prominent names — specifically Pat Coogan (Notre Dame) and Kahlil Benson (Colorado) — out of the portal.

Indiana's running back room experienced a lot of turnover, but don't expect a drop-off. The Hoosiers grabbed a pair of explosive running back transfers — Roman Hemby (Maryland) and Lee Beebe Jr. (UAB) — who ranked among the top pass-catchers in the FBS last season at their position, an element that was missing from Cignetti's offense last season.

DEFENSE Indiana can boast of All-Americans at every level of the defense with edge rusher Mikail Kamara, linebacker Aiden Fisher and cornerback D'Angelo Ponds all coming back for another season. They helped the Hoosiers finish second nationally in total defense (256.3 yards per game) and sixth in scoring defense (15.6 points per game).

Kamara was a cheat code last season with an FBS-leading 68 quarterback pressures as well as 10 sacks, but he benefited from veteran defensive tackles James Carpenter and CJ West drawing plenty of attention. The Hoosiers needs to rebuild the interior without Carpenter and West.

While the secondary has plenty of talent — the Hoosiers added four experienced defensive backs — they might experience some growing pains as they look for the right mix around Ponds and safety Amare Ferrell.

SPECIALISTS Indiana's kicking game is in good shape with starting placekicker Nicolas Radicic coming back and experienced UCF transfer Mitch McCarthy replacing longtime punter James Evans. Radicic set a single-season program record with 69 PATs — second most in the FBS — and went 10-of-11 on field goals in his first year as a full-time starter.

FINAL ANALYSIS Indiana heard all the critics attributing last season's historic success to one of the easiest schedules among Power 4 teams. Cignetti will ignore the noise, and he has IU well-positioned to win nine or more games in back-to-back seasons for the first time ever thanks to the job he did locking up top returning talent and securing proven transfers.

2024 RESULTS (11-2, 8-1 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	FIU	W	31-7
Sept. 6	Western Illinois	W	77-3
Sept. 14	at UCLA	W	42-13
Sept. 21	Charlotte	W	52-14
Sept. 28	Maryland	W	42-28
Oct. 5	at Northwestern	W	41-24
Oct. 19	Nebraska	W	56-7
Oct. 26	Washington	W	31-17
Nov. 2	at Michigan State	W	47-10
Nov. 9	Michigan	W	20-15
Nov. 23	at Ohio State	L	15-38
Nov. 30	Purdue	W	66-0
Dec. 20	at Notre Dame #	L	17-27

#CFB Playoff First Round

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Old Dominion
Sept. 6	Kennesaw State
Sept. 13	Indiana State
Sept. 20	Illinois
Sept. 27	at Iowa
Oct. 11	at Oregon
Oct. 18	Michigan State
Oct. 25	UCLA
Nov. 1	at Maryland
Nov. 8	at Penn State
Nov. 15	Wisconsin
Nov. 29	at Purdue

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Byron Baldwin, S	★★★★
2.	Davion Chandler, WR	★★★★
3.	Blake Thiry, TE	★★★
4.	Baylor Wilkin, IOL	★★★
5.	Keishaun Calhoun, DL	★★★
6.	Matt Marek, IOL	★★★
7.	Tyrone Burrus, EDGE	★★★
8.	Sean Cuono, RB	★★★
9.	Jhrevious Hall, DL	★★★
10.	Zacharey Smith, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Curt Cignetti • Record at School: 11-2 (1 year)
Career Record: 130-37 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Shanahan
Defensive Coordinator: Bryant Haines • Location: Bloomington, Ind.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (52,626)

IOWA HAWKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 27 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 6-3 BIG TEN

OFFENSE With the Cade McNamara experiment at quarterback now over, Iowa has moved on to former FCS star Mark Gronowski, who led South Dakota State to two FCS national titles and was a four-year starter for the Jackrabbits. He had shoulder surgery this past winter that caused him to miss spring practice, but he is expected to be ready for the start of preseason practice. Gronowski is a threat as both a runner and passer, compiling 12,075 total yards for South Dakota State.

Kaleb Johnson leaves a huge void to fill at running back after leading the Big Ten in rushing in 2024. But Iowa has a promising 1-2 punch in Florida natives Kamari Moulton and Jaziun Patterson to help fill it. Neither has the size of Johnson, but they both might have a little more wiggle in their running style.

They will also run behind an offensive line that returns three starters, including All-Big Ten center Logan Jones.

Iowa needs more productivity from its receivers and will rely on Jacob Gill to build on the season he had a year ago. Gill transferred from Northwestern and led Iowa with 411 receiving yards last season.

DEFENSE Considered by many the best in the business, defensive coordinator Phil Parker will get to prove it as Iowa replaces several key starters.

The defensive line should be rock solid, with three of the top four defensive ends from last season all returning, along with senior tackle Aaron Graves. Senior Xavier Nwankpa, a former 5-star recruit, also returns at strong safety, where he has started multiple games.

How quickly the linebackers develop will be crucial to Iowa's success. Senior Karson Sharar leads the returning linebackers with just 21 career tackles, most of them coming on special teams.

SPECIALISTS A strong case could be made that Iowa has the best kicker-punter-return specialist trio in the country in kicker Drew Stevens, punter Rhys Dakin and returner Kaden Wetjen. Stevens made 20-of-23 field-goal attempts last season, while Dakin averaged 44.1 yards as a freshman punter. Wetjen averaged 28.0 yards on 26 kickoff returns and 12.6 yards on 26 punt returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Iowa seems to be a lock to win at least eight or nine games every season under Ferentz. The Hawkeyes have won at least eight games in nine of the past 10 seasons, the lone exception being the 2020-shortened COVID season when they finished 6-2. If the rebuilt defense plays up to Iowa's high standard, and if Gronowski lives up to the hype at quarterback, eight or nine wins could be a reasonable expectation.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 6-3 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Illinois State	W	40-0
Sept. 7	Iowa State	L	19-20
Sept. 14	Troy	W	38-21
Sept. 21	at Minnesota	W	31-14
Oct. 5	at Ohio State	L	7-35
Oct. 12	Washington	W	40-16
Oct. 19	at Michigan State	L	20-32
Oct. 26	Northwestern	W	40-14
Nov. 2	Wisconsin	W	42-10
Nov. 8	at UCLA	L	17-20
Nov. 23	at Maryland	W	29-13
Nov. 29	Nebraska	W	13-10
Dec. 30	vs. Missouri #	L	24-27

#Music City Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Albany
Sept. 6	at Iowa State
Sept. 13	UMass
Sept. 20	at Rutgers
Sept. 27	Indiana
Oct. 11	at Wisconsin
Oct. 18	Penn State
Oct. 25	Minnesota
Nov. 8	Oregon
Nov. 15	at USC
Nov. 22	Michigan State
Nov. 28	at Nebraska

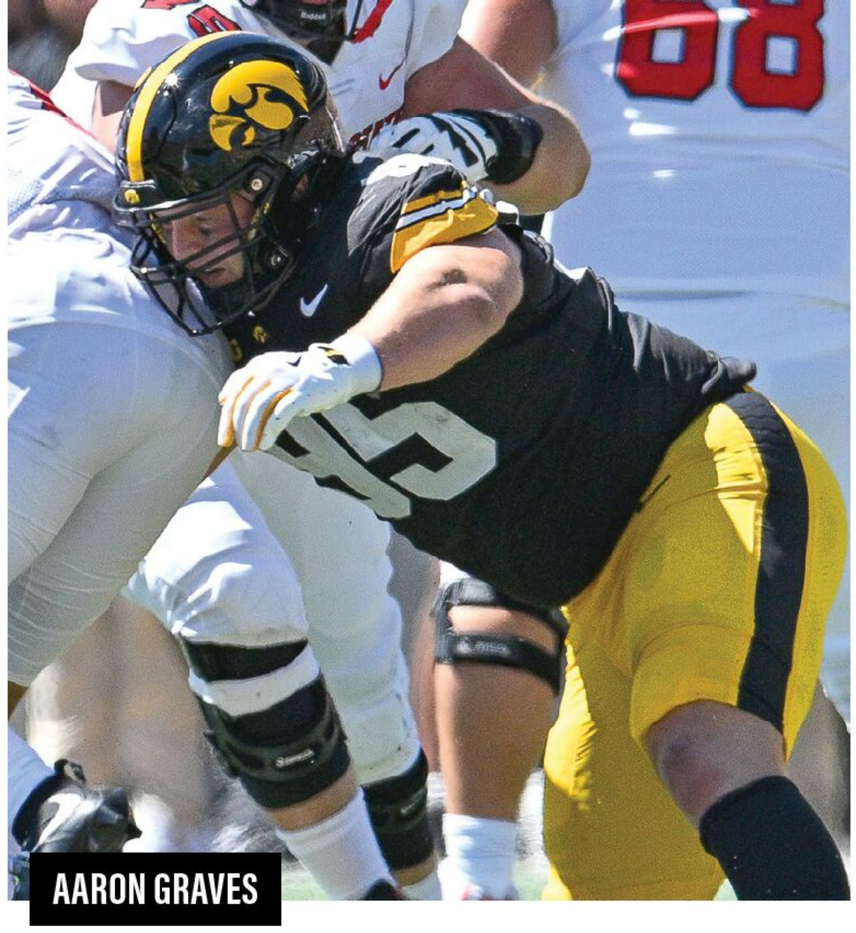
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Iose Epenesa, DL	★★★★
2.	Carson Cooney, LB	★★★★
3.	Burke Gautcher, LB	★★★★
4.	Thomas Meyer, TE	★★★★
5.	Lucas Allgeyer, OT	★★★
6.	Terrence Smith, WR	★★★
7.	Eli Johnson, TE	★★★
8.	Joey VanWetzinga, IOL	★★★
9.	Nathan McNeil, RB	★★★
10.	CJ Bell Jr., CB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirk Ferentz • Record at School: 204-124 (26 years) • Career Record: 216-145 (29 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Lester • Defensive Coordinator: Phil Parker • Location: Iowa City, Iowa • Stadium: Kinnick Stadium (69,250)



AARON GRAVES

SCOUTING THE HAWKEYES

"You can look at them two different ways. The first is, this is the kind of roster where [Kirk] Ferentz surprises opponents, and they come out more cohesive and physical than you expect because that's Iowa football, especially on defense. We've seen rosters like these where you look up and Iowa's winning 10 games, and that didn't seem possible. The second is that they're still really struggling on offense, to the point where [Tim] Lester and that staff have everything riding on a FCS transfer quarterback [Mark Gronowski] who didn't play in the spring at all. We've seen this work before at a lot of different schools, but it could also fall apart. They have questions all over the offense, too, especially at receiver. If Gronowski is good, though, they'll be fine."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	**15**	**REECE VANDER ZEE (SO.)**	7	Dayton Howard (So.)
WR	6	Seth Anderson (Sr.)	12	KJ Parker (Fr.)
WR	**5**	**JACOB GILL (SR.)**	21	Kaden Wetjen. (Sr.)
LT	71	Jack Dotzler (Jr.)	74	Trevor Lauck (So.)
LG	**70**	**BEAU STEPHENS (SR.)**	64	Leighton Jones (So.)
C	**65**	**Logan Jones (Sr.)**	61	Cael Winter (So.)
RG	58	Kade Pieper (So.)	53	Michael Myslinski (Sr.)
RT	**67**	**GENNINGS DUNKER (SR.)**	75	Cannon Leonard (So.)
TE	87	Addison Ostrenga (Sr.)	48	Zach Ortwerth (Sr.)
QB	11	Mark Gronowski (Sr.)	9	Hank Brown (So.)
RB	28	Kamari Moulton (So.)	4	Jaziun Patterson (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	48	Max Llewellyn (Sr.)	44	Kenneth Merrieweather (So.)
DT	**95**	**AARON GRAVES (SR.)**	57	Will Hubert (Jr.)
DT	55	Jeremiah Pittman (Sr.)	51	Luke Gaffney (Jr.)
DE	**49**	**ETHAN HURKETT (SR.)**	84	Joseph Anderson (Fr.)
OLB	12	Jaxon Rexroth (Sr.)	22	Derek Weisskopf (Fr.)
ILB	41	Jaden Harrell (Sr.)	36	Jayden Montgomery (Jr.)
ILB	43	Karson Sharar (Sr.)	23	Landyn Van Kekerix (Jr.)
CB	**2**	**TJ HALL (SR.)**	3	Jaylen Watson (So.)
CB	**8**	**DESHAUN LEE (JR.)**	7	Rashad Godfrey Jr. (Fr.)
SS	**1**	**XAVIER NWANKPA (SR.)**	26	Kael Kolarik (Jr.)
FS	4	Koen Entringer (Jr.)	6	Zach Lutmer (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	18	Drew Stevens (Sr.)	KR	21	Kaden Wetjen (Sr.)
P	9	Rhys Dakin (So.)	PR	21	Kaden Wetjen (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JEFFREY BECKER-USA TODAY SPORTS

NOLAN RAY

SCOUTING THE TERRAPINS

"It's nearly impossible to tell what they're going to look like, but it sure seems like it's getting harder and harder for these guys. The portal hit them really hard, and they're recruiting high schools really well, but I don't think they can keep pace and expect to stay competitive. You can't succeed in this league without some roster consistency. ... On the flip side, they're landing elite-level players right now for the most recent signing class and next season. You can't argue with Lock's [Mike Locksley's] results [in recruiting]. So how does it all come together? I think they're going to struggle on both sides again this season, and the offensive line has to improve immediately. But they're working a plan for the future. The missing piece is landing, developing and then retaining these players."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	1	Jalil Farooq (Sr.)	4	Shaleak Knotts (Sr.)
WR	**5**	**OCTAVIAN SMITH JR. (SR.)**	11	Ryan Manning (So.)
WR	84	Kaleb Webb (Jr.)	8	Mekhai White (Fr.)
LT	76	Rahtrel Perry (Jr.)	50	Trevor Szymanski (Fr.)
LG	75	Ryan Howerton (Fr.)	70	Jaylen Gilchrist (Fr.)
C	74	Isaiah Wright (Sr.)	61	Michael Hershey (So.)
RG	**66**	**ALIOU BAH (JR.)**	78	Anthony Robsock (Fr.)
RT	**71**	**ALAN HERRON (SR.)**	50	Trevor Szymanski (Fr.)
TE	9	Dorian Fleming (So.)	16	Leon Haughton Jr. (Jr.)
QB	6	Justyn Martin (Jr.)	7	Malik Washington (Fr.)
RB	25	Nolan Ray (So.)	20	DeJuan Williams (Fr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	0	Neeo Avery (So.)	39	Daniel Owens (Jr.)
NT	98	Eyan Thomas (So.)	56	DD Holmes (So.)
DT	46	Dillan Fontus (Jr.)	57	Bryce Jenkins (Fr.)
DE	42	DJ Samuels (Jr.)	3	Trey Reddick (So.)
MLB	31	Michael Harris (Jr.)	23	Keyshawn Flowers (So.)
WLB	16	Daniel Wingate (So.)	35	Keyari James (So.)
CB	6	Dontay Joyner (Jr.)	11	Kevyn Humes (So.)
CB	14	Jamare Glasker (Jr.)	2	Braydon Lee (Fr.)
NB	27	La'khi Roland (So.)	21	Judah Jenkins (So.)
SS	**22**	**JALEN HUSKEY (SR.)**	26	Shamar McIntosh (So.)
FS	13	Lavain Scruggs (Jr.)	33	Messiah Delhomme (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Gavin Marshall (Jr.)	KR	17	Josiah McLaurin (So.)
P	34	Bryce McFerson (Jr.)	PR	26	Ricardo Cooper (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANIEL KUCIN JR.-IMAGN IMAGES

MARYLAND TERRAPINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 78 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 17 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN

OFFENSE There's a sense of urgency in "The Shell" with just three offensive starters back, a slew of new coaches and only four wins to show for 2024. Seventh-year head coach Mike Locksley must identify a quarterback from favorites Justyn Martin (who completed 24 passes over five games at UCLA) and 4-star freshman Malik Washington. Count on both playing and showing off considerable skills to overcome their lack of experience. Conversely, new offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton has plenty of experience, having worked for seven NFL teams, mostly in QB development.

The good news: Maryland has receivers, including Octavian Smith Jr. (30 catches for 315 yards) and transfers Jalil Farooq (Oklahoma) and Kaleb Webb (Tennessee). Running back Nolan Ray is a proven producer. The bad news: The line returns only two starters after allowing 2.2 sacks per game and paving the way for only 3.6 yards per carry (110th in the FBS). Some freshmen will work into roles, but that's not a formula for Big Ten success.

DEFENSE New coordinator Ted Monachino brings NFL pedigree and a penchant for pass-rush prowess. The Terrapins were last in the Big Ten with 14 sacks, and all the starters up front are gone. Maryland was also near the bottom of the conference in scoring defense (30.4 ppg), total defense (378.1 ypg) and takeaways (17). The unit then took a hit in the spring when veteran linebackers Kellan Wyatt and Caleb Wheatland, who had a combined 39 career starts, entered the portal. Daniel Wingate is back to help man the middle after ranking third in total tackles (50).

Sometimes-spectacular corner Jalen Huskey moves to safety. Arkansas State transfer corner Dontay Joyner turned heads all offseason, and Wake Forest transfer Jamare Glasker can help. There are also a lot of candidates on the rebuilt front, where Neeo Avery needs to shine, and pass-rusher Trey Reddick made a move in spring. True freshman end Zahir Mathis may be the next big thing — but probably not this season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Jack Howes entered the transfer portal, leaving Gavin Marshall as the next man up. Bryce McFerson was fifth in the Big Ten with his 45.1-yard punting average. Veteran assistant Andre Powell is back to coach the special teams, his second tour of duty. His Maryland unit ranked 11th in the country in efficiency by ESPN in 2014.

FINAL ANALYSIS Locksley's team won 23 games and reached three bowls in the three years prior to last season. They missed an open window, not doing more with quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa prior to his graduation in '24. Locksley's greatest victories have been keeping top talent in the DMV (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia) and piling up good recruiting classes. That talent needs to translate to production this fall.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 1-8 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	UConn	W	50-7
Sept. 7	Michigan State	L	24-27
Sept. 14	at Virginia	W	27-13
Sept. 21	Villanova	W	38-20
Sept. 28	at Indiana	L	28-42
Oct. 11	Northwestern	L	10-37
Oct. 19	USC	W	29-28
Oct. 26	at Minnesota	L	23-48
Nov. 9	at Oregon	L	18-39
Nov. 16	Rutgers	L	17-31
Nov. 23	Iowa	L	13-29
Nov. 30	at Penn State	L	7-44

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Florida Atlantic
Sept. 6	Northern Illinois
Sept. 13	Towson
Sept. 20	at Wisconsin
Oct. 4	Washington
Oct. 11	Nebraska
Oct. 18	at UCLA
Nov. 1	Indiana
Nov. 8	at Rutgers
Nov. 15	at Illinois
Nov. 22	Michigan
Nov. 29	at Michigan State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen Gilchrist, IOL	★★★★
2.	Malik Washington, QB	★★★★
3.	Iverson Howard, RB	★★★★
4.	Zahir Mathis, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Messiah Delhomme, S	★★★
6.	Bryce Jenkins, DL	★★★
7.	Zymear Smith, ATH	★★★
8.	Justin DeVaughn, WR	★★★
9.	Travares Daniels II, LB	★★★
10.	Lamar Williams, OT	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Locksley • Record at School: 33-41 (6+ years) • Career Record: 35-67 (8+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Pep Hamilton • Defensive Coordinator: Ted Monachino • Location: College Park, Md. • Stadium: SECU Stadium (51,802)

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 15 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE There's no way to go this year but up for Michigan, which ranked 129th nationally in total offense in 2024 (286.2 yards per game). A big part of its problem was at the quarterback position, where the Wolverines rotated a trio of starters and posted one of the nation's worst passing offenses — failing to execute a pass play of 40-plus yards all season.

Head coach Sherrone Moore replaced his coordinator with veteran play-caller and QBs coach Chip Lindsey from North Carolina, who is expected to add some flair to an offense in desperate need of a jumpstart. Fresno State transfer Mikey Keene is expected to push 5-star freshman Bryce Underwood for the starting job, while the Wolverines added former All-Big Ten wideout Donaven McCulley (Indiana) and Alabama running back Justice Haynes, bolstering two areas in need of playmakers.

If Michigan can get improved play up front, rekindling its dominant, physical approach, look for the offense to be markedly better.

DEFENSE It's possible that this Michigan defense will match the top-20 unit of last year, despite losing a pair of early-round NFL Draft picks (Mason Graham, Will Johnson). The Wolverines return playmakers TJ Guy and Derrick Moore on the edge, hoping to make up for the production lost from departed sack leader Josaiah Stewart, a third-round draft pick. Transfers Tré Williams (Clemson) and Damon Payne (Alabama) bolster an already deep tackle room full of guys who've waited their turn.

Meanwhile, starters Jaishawn Barham and Ernest Hausmann are both back at linebacker. The secondary is a bit of a mystery, but if former All-Big Ten safety Rod Moore returns healthy from an ACL injury, the Wolverines have several plug-and-play pieces back there to make do. Michigan closed the season by allowing only two TDs in its final 14 quarters of play — a stretch that included wins over Ohio State and Alabama.

SPECIALISTS Big Ten Kicker of the Year Dominic Zvada is motivated after being snubbed from the Lou Groza Award finalist list. He was 26-of-27 on PATs and 21-of-22 on field-goal attempts, including 7-of-7 from 50-plus yards. Former backup Hudson Hollenbeck is the front-runner to punt, though Michigan may look for an upgrade. Returns will be a continued emphasis; look for receiver Semaj Morgan to be involved this fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Wolverines will have better QB play, a more explosive offense and a deeper defense with a secondary that should force plenty of turnovers. Combine that with an easier schedule, and life in Ann Arbor should be more enjoyable this fall for Moore, who got a late start and was learning on the job last year.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Fresno State	W	30-10
Sept. 7	Texas	L	12-31
Sept. 14	Arkansas State	W	28-18
Sept. 21	USC	W	27-24
Sept. 28	Minnesota	W	27-24
Oct. 5	at Washington	L	17-27
Oct. 19	at Illinois	L	7-21
Oct. 26	Michigan State	W	24-17
Nov. 2	Oregon	L	17-38
Nov. 9	at Indiana	L	15-20
Nov. 23	Northwestern	W	50-6
Nov. 30	at Ohio State	W	13-10
Dec. 31	vs. Alabama #	W	19-13

#ReliaQuest Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	New Mexico
Sept. 6	at Oklahoma
Sept. 13	Central Michigan
Sept. 20	at Nebraska
Oct. 4	Wisconsin
Oct. 11	at USC
Oct. 18	Washington
Oct. 25	at Michigan State
Nov. 1	Purdue
Nov. 15	vs. Northwestern #
Nov. 22	at Maryland
Nov. 29	Ohio State

#Chicago

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bryce Underwood, QB	★★★★★
2.	Andrew Babalola, OT	★★★★★
3.	Nate Marshall, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Kainoa Winston, S	★★★★
5.	Ty Haywood, OT	★★★★
6.	Shamari Earls, CB	★★★★
7.	Jacob Washington, WR	★★★★
8.	Jordan Young, S	★★★★
9.	Benny Patterson, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Elijah Dotson, CB	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sherrone Moore • Record at School: 9-5 (1+ years)
Career Record: 9-5 (1+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Chip Lindsey
Defensive Coordinator: Wink Martindale • Location: Ann Arbor, Mich.
Stadium: Michigan Stadium (107,601)

ERNEST HAUSMANN

SCOUTING THE WOLVERINES

"It's tempting to look at these rosters after the national title and define them by what they lose to the draft every year, but we don't do that with [Kirby] Smart or [Nick] Saban or those programs. Michigan is an elite-level recruiting program. So yeah, they lost a Mason Graham, but they're ready to plug in that next guy. It's not plug and play, but it's close. ... They would've been a serious postseason contender last year if they had a quarterback on the roster. Now they do, so it's all about how fast [Chip] Lindsey can get him up to speed and going. The focus is on [Bryce] Underwood, but it should be on finding new backs to go with him. They're not going to change that [Jim] Harbaugh identity all that much, and the ground game is how they define themselves."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	5	Donaven McCulley (Sr.)	88	Jamar Browder (Fr.)
WR	3	Fredrick Moore (Jr.)	5	C.J. Charleston (Sr.)
WR	0	Semaj Morgan (Jr.)	4	Andrew Marsh (Fr.)
LT	71	**EVAN LINK (JR.)**	70	Brady Norton (Jr.)
LG	58	**GIOVANNI EL-HADI (SR.)**		Lawrence Hattar (Sr.)
C	51	**GREG CRIPPEN (SR.)**	53	Jake Guarnera (So.)
RG	55	Nathan Efobi (Jr.)	50	Luke Hamilton (So.)
RT	54	Andrew Sprague (So.)	77	Blake Frazier (So.)
TE	17	Marlin Klein (Sr.)	80	Hogan Hansen (So.)
QB	19	Bryce Underwood (Fr.)	10	Mikey Keene (Sr.)
RB	22	Justice Haynes (Jr.)	23	Jordan Marshall (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	4	TJ Guy (Sr.)	33	Dominic Nichols (So.)
DT	55	Rayshaun Benny (Sr.)	44	Damon Payne (Sr.)
DT	0	Tré Williams (Sr.)	17	Enow Etta (Jr.)
DE	8	**DERRICK MOORE (SR.)**	91	Cameron Brandt (Jr.)
ILB	15	**ERNEST HAUSMANN (SR.)**	23	Cole Sullivan (So.)
ILB	1	**JAISHAWN BARHAM (SR.)**	30	Jimmy Rolder (Sr.)
CB	20	**JYAIRE HILL (JR.)**	2	Shamari Earls (Fr.)
CB	10	**ZEKE BERRY (SR.)**	13	Caleb Anderson (Sr.)
NB	7	TJ Metcalf (Jr.)	16	Jo'Ziah Edmond (So.)
S	9	**ROD MOORE (SR.)**	25	Mason Curtis (So.)
S	6	Brandyn Hillman (Jr.)	3	Jaden Mangham (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	96	Dominic Zvada (Sr.)	KR	23	Jordan Marshall (So.)
P	90	Hudson Hollenbeck (Sr.)	PR	0	Semaj Morgan (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

RICK OSENTOSKI-USA TODAY SPORTS

AIDAN CHILES

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

"[Jonathan] Smith is applying a very steady plan here. They're not going to make a huge splash; they're just going to improve steadily. He's got a blueprint that worked for him at Oregon State. ... They need a lot of work on defense, specifically the line and the secondary, at corner, and the running game was pretty mediocre for them last year. But they've done a really solid job with transfers, and they're still building their high school recruiting out. If you're looking for a most improved program this season, these guys might be it. [Aidan] Chiles was doing too much last year; they made a staff change and brought in one of his guys, and I think that can help. A bowl is definitely possible for them this year, and the roster is going to be better overall."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	**6**	**NICK MARSH (SO.)**	8	Evan Boyd (So.)
WR	1	Omari Kelly (Sr.)	3	Rodney Bullard Jr. (Sr.)
WR	13	Chrishon McCray (Jr.)	0	Alante Brown (Sr.)
LT	**65**	**STANTON RAMIL (SO.)**	73	Rustin Young (Fr.)
LG	74	Gavin Broscious (Jr.)	72	Caleb Carter (Sr.)
C	51	Matt Gulbin (Sr.)	55	Rakeem Johnson (So.)
RG	60	Luka Vincic (Jr.)	71	Kristian Phillips (Jr.)
RT	58	Conner Moore (Jr.)	**66**	**ASHTON LEPO (JR.)**
TE	**12**	**JACK VELLING (SR.)**	81	Michael Masunas (Jr.)
QB	**2**	**AIDAN CHILES (JR.)**	11	Alessio Milivojevic (Fr.)
RB	4	Elijah Tau-Tolliver (Sr.)	5	Makhi Frazier (So.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**9**	**JALEN THOMPSON (JR.)**	99	Quindarius Dunnigan (Sr.)
NT	16	Grady Kelly (Sr.)	88	Ru'Quan Buckley (Sr.)
DT	**91**	**ALEX VANSUMEREN (JR.)**	93	Jalen Satchel (Sr.)
EDGE	41	David Santiago (So.)		Isaac Smith (Jr.)
MLB	5	Jordan Hall (Jr.)	4	Marcellius Pulliam (Jr.)
WLB	10	Wayne Matthews III (Sr.)	23	Darius Snow (Sr.)
CB	**25**	**CHANCE RUCKER (SO.)**		Anthony Pinnace (Jr.)
CB	7	Joshua Eaton (Sr.)	18	Andrew Brinson IV (So.)
NB	6	Ade Willie (Sr.)	3	Jeremiah Hughes (Jr.)
SS	**43**	**MALIK SPENCER (SR.)**		Tracy Revels (So.)
FS	**1**	**NIKAI MARTINEZ (SR.)**	12	Justin Denson Jr. (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	40	Tarik Ahmetbasic (So.)	**KR**	0 Alante Brown (Sr.)
P	96	Ryan Eckley (Jr.)	**PR**	1 Omari Kelly (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

RICK OSENTOSKI-IMAGN IMAGES

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 53 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 14 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Michigan State enters year two of the Jonathan Smith era in search of an identity similar to the physicality Smith instilled at Oregon State — as well as the Spartans' first bowl bid since 2021. To get there, Michigan State will need stark improvement from a revamped offensive line, consistency from talented but erratic junior quarterback Aidan Chiles and explosiveness from a new supporting cast of wide receivers built around standout Nick Marsh. Chiles ranked No. 12 in the Big Ten in passing yards per game (201.3) and 11th in completion rate (59.4%) while tying for the most interceptions in the conference with 11. He should improve those numbers. Marsh had 41 catches for 649 yards — both school records for a true freshman. Four transfer wideouts, led by flanker Omari Kelly (53 catches at Middle Tennessee last season), impressed in the spring.

Transfer Elijah Tau-Tolliver (950 rushing yards and 38 catches at FCS Sacramento State) offers hope for a ground game that ranked No. 16 in the league in yards per rush at 3.51. Tight end Jack Velling returns after finishing third on the team last season with 36 receptions.

The Spartans should be improved up front, with a better feel for line coach Jim Michalczik's system. Transfers at center, right guard and right tackle are likely to start. Stanton Ramil has star potential at left tackle. Right tackle Conner Moore was an FCS All-American at Montana State.

DEFENSE Michigan State will be strong up the middle with sound defensive tackles, depth at inside linebacker and a pair of accountable safeties.

Malik Spencer has All-Big Ten potential as a third-year starter at strong safety. Mike linebacker Jordan Hall showed improved quickness in the spring and is poised for a breakthrough. Defensive tackles Alex VanSumeren and Grady Kelly are sturdy, with depth behind them.

Jalen Thompson has started 16 straight games at defensive end and is ready to take his playmaking skills up a notch — possibly as a stand-up edge, although he is not a natural pass-rusher. Transfer cornerback Joshua Eaton (Texas State) will help bolster the secondary.

SPECIALISTS Punter Ryan Eckley led the Big Ten with a 47.9-yard average in 2024. Placekickers Tarik Ahmetbasic and Martin Connington have never attempted a field goal in college. They performed well in the spring and will compete for the job until the season opener vs. Western Michigan.

FINAL ANALYSIS Smith says "at minimum" he expects Michigan State to get back into a bowl game in 2025 with plans to "play way more than 12 games" in a season soon. The first half of that objective is reachable if the Spartans can pick off at least two road wins in swing games at Nebraska, Indiana, Minnesota and Iowa. Chiles and the O-line hold the key.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Florida Atlantic	W	16-10
Sept. 7	at Maryland	W	27-24
Sept. 14	Prairie View	W	40-0
Sept. 21	at Boston College	L	19-23
Sept. 28	Ohio State	L	7-38
Oct. 4	at Oregon	L	10-31
Oct. 19	Iowa	W	32-20
Oct. 26	at Michigan	L	17-24
Nov. 2	Indiana	L	10-47
Nov. 16	at Illinois	L	16-38
Nov. 22	Purdue	W	24-17
Nov. 30	Rutgers	L	14-41

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Western Michigan
Sept. 6	Boston College
Sept. 13	Youngstown State
Sept. 20	at USC
Oct. 4	at Nebraska
Oct. 11	UCLA
Oct. 18	at Indiana
Oct. 25	Michigan
Nov. 1	at Minnesota
Nov. 15	Penn State
Nov. 22	at Iowa
Nov. 29	Maryland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Derrick Simmons, DL	★★★★
2.	DJ White, LB	★★★★
3.	Jace Clarizio, RB	★★★
4.	Aydan West, CB	★★★
5.	Braylon Collier, WR	★★★
6.	Jayden Savoury, TE	★★★
7.	Evan Young, S	★★★
8.	DiMari Malone, LB	★★★
9.	Leo Hannan, QB	★★★
10.	Justin Bell, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jonathan Smith • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 39-42 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brian Lindgren • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Rossi • Location: East Lansing, Mich. • Stadium: Spartan Stadium (75,005)

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 42 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The Gophers undergo another transition at quarterback, and the goal is for the success last season of savvy sixth-year senior Max Brosmer to rub off on redshirt freshman and presumed starter Drake Lindsey.

Brosmer's strong decision-making and accuracy led Minnesota to an 8-5 season in 2024. He relied on a pair of senior receivers, Daniel Jackson and Elijah Spencer, who accounted for around 50% of Minnesota's receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns. But that duo is done, and the replacements will largely come by committee.

Given the turnover, offensive coordinator Greg Harbaugh Jr. plans to rely more on the running game. That starts with junior Darius Taylor, who had 986 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground last season. He can also be a safety blanket for Lindsey after posting 54 catches for 350 yards.

Minnesota's offensive line needs to replace three starters, including rising standout Phillip Daniels, who transferred to Ohio State. How quickly the group can jell will determine Minnesota's ceiling.

DEFENSE Minnesota promoted Danny Collins to replace Corey Hetherman as defensive coordinator after Hetherman used a stout season to get a raise for the same job at Miami (Fla.).

Collins' brand of defense is nicknamed HAVOC. It's an acronym — H for how hard they play; A for its attacking style; V for violence; O is for playing together as one; and C for its compete level.

First-team All-Big Ten safety Koi Perich leads a secondary that must replace its top two cornerbacks and No. 1 nickleback. Top tackler Cody Lindenberg is off to the NFL, but backups have been seasoned. Anthony Smith and Deven Eastern headline a defensive line that is top-heavy with veterans but in need of quality depth.

SPECIALISTS For the first time in years, Minnesota must replace its kicker and punter, and who wins those jobs will be determined in fall camp. Syracuse transfer Brady Denaburg appears to be the front-runner at kicker, while punter will likely come down to a pair of native Minnesotans, Caleb McGrath and Luke Ryerse. Perich, a Freshman All-American, can be a problem on both return units.

FINAL ANALYSIS After a one-year slip, Minnesota posted another winning season in 2024 as head coach P.J. Fleck continues to avoid consecutive losing seasons. But the departure of one of the Gophers' deepest draft classes takes away a lot of high-end talent. Still, if Lindsey can shine, wideouts step forward, the O-line coalesces and answers emerge on all three levels of the defense, the Gophers can produce a winning campaign.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Aug. 29	North Carolina	L	17-19
Sept. 7	Rhode Island	W	48-0
Sept. 14	Nevada	W	27-0
Sept. 21	Iowa	L	14-31
Sept. 28	at Michigan	L	24-27
Oct. 5	USC	W	24-17
Oct. 12	at UCLA	W	21-17
Oct. 26	Maryland	W	48-23
Nov. 2	at Illinois	W	25-17
Nov. 9	at Rutgers	L	19-26
Nov. 23	Penn State	L	25-26
Nov. 29	at Wisconsin	W	24-7
Jan. 3	vs. Virginia Tech #	W	24-10

#Duke's Mayo Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Buffalo
Sept. 6	Northwestern State
Sept. 13	at Cal
Sept. 27	Rutgers
Oct. 4	at Ohio State
Oct. 11	Purdue
Oct. 18	Nebraska
Oct. 25	at Iowa
Nov. 1	Michigan State
Nov. 15	at Oregon
Nov. 22	vs. Northwestern #
Nov. 29	Wisconsin

#Chicago

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Bradley Martino, WR	★★★★
2.	Enoch Atewogbola, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Mark Handy, IOL	★★★★
4.	Ethan Stendel, LB	★★★★
5.	Emmanuel Karmo, LB	★★★
6.	Jackson Kollock, QB	★★★
7.	Legend Lyons, WR	★★★
8.	Kaveon Lee, OT	★★★
9.	Jayquan Stubbs, DL	★★★
10.	Zack Harden Jr., S	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: P.J. Fleck • Record at School: 56-39 (8 years) • Career Record: 86-61 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Greg Harbaugh Jr.
Defensive Coordinator: Danny Collins • Location: Minneapolis, Minn.
Stadium: Huntington Bank Stadium (50,805)

DARIUS TAYLOR

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN GOPHERS

"P.J. [Fleck] has built a consistent winner even though it's not at an elite level. So the good news is the bad news, depending on your expectations, because it is more of the same. I think [Drake] Lindsey is the starting quarterback based on what we saw coming out of the spring game, and they need to establish the wide receiver group. The offensive line lost a lot of experience, and they're portaling a group together, so that could be a potential problem. Jaxon [Howard] is a special talent on defense; he could be a real game-wrecker. ... It's no secret Fleck wants to be at a high-end, title-contending program. This doesn't look like a '19 season on paper, but if they win nine games or so, he'll be on the hunt to move."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	0	**LE'MEKE BROCKINGTON (SR.)**	13	Logan Loya (Sr.)
WR	11	Javon Tracy (Jr.)	8	Jalen Smith (Fr.)
WR	4	Cristian Driver (Jr.)	15	Kenric Lanier II (So.)
LT	50	Nathan Roy (Fr.)	71	Kahlee Tafai (So.)
LG	**65**	**GREG JOHNSON (JR.)**	76	Reese Tripp (So.)
C	**78**	**ASHTON BEERS (JR.)**	56	Brett Carroll (Fr.)
RG	74	Marcellus Marshall (Sr.)	59	Tony Nelson (Jr.)
RT	73	Dylan Ray (Sr.)	70	Aluma Nkele (Sr.)
TE	**86**	**JAMESON GEERS (SR.)**	87	Drew Biber (Sr.)
QB	5	Drake Lindsey (Fr.)	6	Max Shikenjanski (So.)
RB	**1**	**DARIUS TAYLOR (JR.)**	2	A.J. Turner (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	0	Anthony Smith (Jr.)	8	Steven Curtis (Jr.)
DT	**91**	**DEVEN EASTERN (SR.)**	16	Rushawn Lawrence (Sr.)
DT	**97**	**JALEN LOGAN-REDDING (SR.)**	89	Nate Becker (Sr.)
DE	1	Jaxon Howard (So.)	46	Lucas Finnessy (Sr.)
LB	**6**	**MAVERICK BARANOWSKI (JR.)**	20	Jeff Roberson (Sr.)
LB	9	Devon Williams (Sr.)	19	Joey Gerlach (Jr.)
CB	5	Jaylen Bowden (Jr.)	18	Rhyland Kelly (Jr.)
CB	4	Za'Quan Bryan (So.)	7	John Nestor (Jr.)
NB	24	Jai'Onte' McMillan (Sr.)	12	Darius Green (Sr.)
S	3	Koi Perich (So.)	23	Garrison Monroe (So.)
S	**14**	**KERRY BROWN (SO.)**	**7**	**AIDAN GOUSBY (JR.)**

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Brady Denaburg (Sr.)	KR	3	Koi Perich (So.)
P	95	Caleb McGrath (So.)	PR	3	Koi Perich (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JEFF HANISCH-IMAGN IMAGES

DYLAN RAIOLA

SCOUTING THE CONRHUSKERS

"Expectations are building here, but I think this group can meet them. Putting Dana [Holgorsen] in as OC is a great move for Matt [Rhule], and he'll create a lot of advantages for Dylan [Raiola] in that offense. ... The DC change won't really affect what they do schematically; they're still going to run a 3-3-5 base. ... They need a big-play receiver to step up; otherwise, I think they're more talented on paper than the Nebraska roster has been in years. The expectations are that they break out and finally compete among the top level in the league. That might not happen, but I think it's realistic to expect a better bowl destination and more wins, and Dylan to get more national spotlight. Matt knows how to do this, and they're heading in the right direction."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	18	Dane Key (Sr.)	86	Cortez Mills (Fr.)
WR	13	Nyziah Hunter (So.)	84	Isaiah Mozee (Fr.)
WR	17	Jacory Barney Jr. (So.)	16	Janiran Bonner (Jr.)
LT	57	Elijah Pritchett (Jr.)	**77**	**GUNNAR GOTTULA (SO.)**
LG	**69**	**TURNER CORCORAN (SR.)**	76	Jason Maciejczak (So.)
C	51	Justin Evans (Jr.)	62	Sam Sledge (So.)
RG	50	Rocco Spindler (Sr.)	68	Preston Taumua (Fr.)
RT	65	Teddy Prochazka (Sr.)	75	Tyler Knaak (Jr.)
TE	44	Luke Lindenmeyer (Jr.)	10	Heinrich Haarberg (Sr.)
QB	**15**	**DYLAN RAIOLA (SO.)**	19	Jalyn Gramstad (Sr.)
RB	21	Emmett Johnson (Jr.)	28	Kwinten Ives (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DL	11	Cameron Lenhardt (Jr.)	90	Jaylen George (Jr.)
DL	44	Riley Van Poppel (So.)	16	Elijah Jeudy (Sr.)
DL	97	Keona Davis (So.)	96	Williams Nwaneri (Fr.)
LB	1	Vincent Shavers Jr. (So.)	47	Gage Stenger (Jr.)
LB	33	Javin Wright (Sr.)	26	Marques Watson-Trent (Sr.)
JACK	22	Dasan McCullough (Sr.)	17	Willis McGahee IV (So.)
CB	**15**	**CEYAIR WRIGHT (SR.)**	25	Jeremiah Charles (So.)
CB	37	Donovan Jones (Fr.)	10	Andrew Marshall (Jr.)
S	**7**	**MALCOLM HARTZOG JR. (SR.)**	29	Braylen Prude (Fr.)
S	**3**	**MARQUES BUFORD JR. (SR.)**	28	Caleb Benning (Fr.)
S	**8**	**DESHON SINGLETON (SR.)**	19	Justyn Rhett (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	John Hohl (So.)	KR	25	Kenneth Williams (So.)
P	38	Jack McCallister (Sr.)	PR	10	Andrew Marshall (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DYLAN WIDGER-IMAGN IMAGES

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 28 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Dylan Raiola returns for a highly anticipated sophomore campaign after completing 67% of his passes with 13 touchdowns to 11 interceptions. Raiola showed flashes of his elite arm talent in 2024 and dropped weight this offseason to be more of a threat with his feet.

Offensive coordinator Dana Holgorsen will guide Raiola and the Cornhuskers attack full-time in 2025. Holgorsen's relationship with the Air Raid is a thing of the past, but unlocking big plays for the Husker offense will be near the top of the to-do list.

Nebraska will feature running back Emmett Johnson as both a runner and receiver. Johnson was a favorite of Holgorsen's in November, when the back averaged more than five yards per carry and caught 23 passes in four games with Holgorsen calling plays. At wide receiver, Nebraska added Dane Key from Kentucky and Cal's Nyziah Hunter from the transfer portal. Jacory Barney Jr. caught 55 passes last season.

Up front, Nebraska supplemented a deep group with Notre Dame guard Rocco Spindler and Alabama tackle Elijah Pritchett out of the transfer portal. Head coach Matt Rhule called the offensive line one of the "highlights" of spring practices.

DEFENSE New coordinator John Butler will force the issue with pressure and has been tasked with improving third-down and red-zone defense for a group that was a top-20 unit overall in 2023 and 2024.

Nebraska will miss Ty Robinson's 7.0 sacks and 12.5 tackles for a loss, but the Husker defense got a boost with the return of safety DeShon Singleton, who finished second on the team with 71 tackles, and Javin Wright, an athletic linebacker returning for a seventh season. Adding to the experience are transfer linebackers Marques Watson-Trent, the reigning Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year for Georgia Southern, and versatile Dasan McCullough from Oklahoma.

SPECIALISTS Nebraska's shaky special teams units are in the hands of former Tennessee special teams coordinator Mike Ekeler. Ekeler must improve a group that allowed 10 blocked kicks last season. Kicker John Hohl, 10-of-15 on field goals, returns. Improving the Husker punt return game (4.9 yards per return last season) will be a priority.

FINAL ANALYSIS Nebraska took an important step last season, ending a seven-year bowl drought. Year 3 was an important benchmark in Rhule's stops at Temple and Baylor, going 10-4 and 11-3, respectively. With veterans at key spots and important additions from the transfer portal, Nebraska should improve on its progress made in 2024.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	UTEP	W	40-7
Sept. 7	Colorado	W	28-10
Sept. 14	Northern Iowa	W	34-3
Sept. 20	Illinois (ot)	L	24-31
Sept. 28	at Purdue	W	28-10
Oct. 5	Rutgers	W	14-7
Oct. 19	at Indiana	L	7-56
Oct. 26	at Ohio State	L	17-21
Nov. 2	UCLA	L	20-27
Nov. 16	at USC	L	20-28
Nov. 23	Wisconsin	W	44-25
Nov. 29	at Iowa	L	10-13
Dec. 28	vs. Boston College #	W	20-15

#Pinstripe Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	vs. Cincinnati #
Sept. 6	Akron
Sept. 13	Houston Christian
Sept. 20	Michigan
Oct. 4	Michigan State
Oct. 11	at Maryland
Oct. 18	at Minnesota
Oct. 25	Northwestern
Nov. 1	USC
Nov. 8	at UCLA
Nov. 22	at Penn State
Nov. 28	Iowa

#Kansas City, MO

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Malcolm Simpson, DL	★★★★
2.	Jeremiah Jones, ATH	★★★★
3.	Dawson Merritt, LB	★★★★
4.	Cortez Mills, WR	★★★★
5.	Pierce Mooberry, LB	★★★★
6.	Kade Pietrzak, DL	★★★★
7.	Christian Jones, LB	★★★
8.	Isaiah Mozee, WR	★★★
9.	Bryson Webber, CB	★★★
10.	Juju Marks, OT	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Rhule • Record at School: 12-13 (2 years)
Career Record: 59-56 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dana Holgorsen
Defensive Coordinator: John Butler • Location: Lincoln, Neb.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (85,458)

NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 71 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 16 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN

OFFENSE After bottoming out in 2024 — Northwestern finished 130th nationally in total offense, 128th in scoring offense and 111th in passing offense — the Wildcats enter a pivotal season. The big change comes at quarterback with SMU transfer Preston Stone, who had big numbers (3,197 yards, 28 touchdowns) in 2023 and entered 2024 as the starter for the Mustangs. Stone should stabilize a passing game that needs more wide receiver production. FCS South Dakota State transfer Griffin Wilde, who averaged 16.3 yards per catch in 2024, is a significant addition, while Stanford transfer Chase Farrell provides needed top-end speed.

Northwestern finally has numbers on the offensive line. The team retained talented tackle Caleb Tiernan and gets center Jack Bailey back from injury. It also added key transfers like Evan Beernsten (FCS South Dakota State) and Xavior Gray (Liberty).

Running back projects as a team strength. Cam Porter returns for his sixth season and once again, Joseph Himon II and Caleb Komolafe will join him. "We've got to find ways to get Joe the ball more," Braun says.

DEFENSE The defensive front could be the team's strongest position group. NFL prospect Anto Saka returns at end, as does sacks leader Aidan Hubbard. Carmine Bastone, a captain in 2024, is back at tackle with fellow senior Najee Story and Utah State transfer Miguel Jackson.

Northwestern will miss Xander Mueller at linebacker but returns leading tackler Mac Uihlein. Purdue transfer Yanni Karlaftis can play both at the middle and weakside spots, and coaches think sophomore Braydon Brus has a high ceiling.

Despite losing Theran Johnson to Oregon, Northwestern expects the cornerback spot to excel with Josh Fussell and Braden Turner back and Jacksonville State transfer Fred Davis added. Ore Adeyi, who missed the 2024 season with an ACL tear, also returns. Redshirt freshman safety Damon Walters has "a chance to be really special," head coach David Braun says, while nickel safety Robert Fitzgerald is a great instinctive player.

SPECIALISTS Jack Olsen is back to handle placekicking after being limited by injury to five games last fall. Punter Luke Akers showed he could make field goals, going 10-of-14, but he can now focus on his punting duties. Himon once again will handle kickoff returns, while punt returns could go to Drew Wagner or others.

FINAL ANALYSIS The presence of Stone at quarterback and an offensive line with real depth gives Northwestern a chance it didn't really have in 2024. Northwestern's ability to land more transfers and keep some of its better players could put the team back in bowl contention.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Miami (Ohio)	W	13-6
Sept. 6	Duke (ot)	L	20-26
Sept. 14	Eastern Illinois	W	34-7
Sept. 21	at Washington	L	5-24
Oct. 5	Indiana	L	24-41
Oct. 11	at Maryland	W	37-10
Oct. 19	Wisconsin	L	3-23
Oct. 26	at Iowa	L	14-40
Nov. 2	at Purdue (ot)	W	26-20
Nov. 16	Ohio State	L	7-31
Nov. 23	at Michigan	L	6-50
Nov. 30	Illinois	L	28-38

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Tulane
Sept. 6	Western Illinois
Sept. 13	Oregon
Sept. 27	UCLA
Oct. 4	ULM
Oct. 11	at Penn State
Oct. 18	vs. Purdue
Oct. 25	at Nebraska
Nov. 8	at USC
Nov. 15	vs. Michigan #
Nov. 22	vs. Minnesota #
Nov. 29	at Illinois

#Chicago

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Mason Mayne, DL	★★★
2.	Tyler Kielmeyer, TE	★★★
3.	Trey Boyd, OT	★★★
4.	Josh Veldman, LB	★★★
5.	Daniel Anderson, RB	★★★
6.	Michael O'Connell, OT	★★★
7.	Jon Jon Stevens, ATH	★★★
8.	Marquet Dorsey Jr., CB	★★★
9.	Hayden Wright, OT	★★★
10.	Tanner Jumpp, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: David Braun • Record at School: 12-13 (2 years) • Career Record: 12-13 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Zach Lujan • Defensive Coordinator: Tim McGarigle• Location: Evanston, Ill. • Stadium: Martin Stadium (12,023)

CAM PORTER

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"Things don't look great here. The portal is eating up what talent they do have, and the offensive problems are as bad as ever. The talent level is going to be hard to maintain here long-term because they can't sign and develop without getting picked off by other schools now. ... [Preston] Stone is likely the starting QB after spring and losing [Mike] Wright to the portal. ... The defensive identity is still there from Fitz [Pat Fitzgerald], just not as strong. It used to be that playing these guys was such a headache; they were so physical and creative on defense. ... I think the comparison here is Vanderbilt. That program got serious about NIL. It's hard at Northwestern, but it becomes impossible if they don't embrace the reality of what it takes in the Big Ten."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	17	Griffin Wilde (Jr.)	80	Hayden Eligon II (So)
WR	3	Frank Covey IV (So.)	20	Chase Farrell (Fr.)
WR	10	Ricky Ahumaraeze (So.)	11	Donnie Gray (Sr.)
LT	**72**	**CALEB TIERNAN (SR.)**	75	Martes Lewis (Sr.)
LG	62	Ezomo Oratokhai (Fr.)	64	Anthony Birsa (Fr.)
C	**69**	**JACK BAILEY (SR.)**	**65**	**JACKSON CARSELLO (SR.)**
RG	60	Evan Beerntsen (Sr.)	74	Nick Herzog (So.)
RT	63	Xavior Gray (Sr.)	73	Deuce McGuire (So.)
TE	86	Lawson Albright (Sr.)	84	Hunter Welcing (Jr.)
QB	8	Preston Stone (Sr.)	**12**	**JACK LAUSCH (JR.)**
RB	**4**	**CAM PORTER (SR.)**	6	Joseph Himon II (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	**91**	**AIDAN HUBBARD (SR.)**	47	Michael Kilbane (Jr.)
DT	**90**	**CARMINE BASTONE (SR.)**	15	Brendan Flakes (Jr.)
DT	**95**	**NAJEE STORY (SR.)**	94	Miguel Jackson (Sr.)
DE	4	Anto Saka (Jr.)	52	Richie Hagarty (Sr.)
LB	33	Braydon Brus (Jr.)	42	Nigel Glover (So.)
LB	**37**	**MAC UIHLEIN (SR.)**	14	Yanni Karlaftis (Sr.)
CB	2	Fred Davis (Sr.)	7	Ore Adeyi (Jr.)
CB	**13**	**JOSH FUSSELL (SO.)**	9	Braden Turner (Jr.)
NB	**9**	**BRADEN TURNER (JR.)**	26	Jalen Lewis (Fr.)
S	21	Damon Walters (So.)	31	Tito Williams Jr. (Fr.)
S	6	Robert Fitzgerald (So.)	18	Garner Wallace (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	82	Jack Olsen (Sr.)	KR	6 Joseph Himon II (Jr.)
P	11	Luke Akers (Sr.)	PR	19 Drew Wagner (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

REINHOLD MATAY-USA TODAY SPORTS

JEREMIAH SMITH

BRETT DAVIS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BUCKEYES

"Year in and year out, this is the most talented program in the league and one of the most talented in the nation. The question every season is just if they can arrange that talent the right way. Whoever wins the quarterback battle has one of the best receiver rooms in the country. The defense is stocked; defensive tackle might be their question mark, but they're going to dominate in league play. ... The resilience of [Ryan] Day and his staff is really, really remarkable. I don't think they get enough credit from the public for how they managed the playoff run after losing to Michigan. The calls for his job were absolutely ludicrous. Do they need to beat Michigan? Yeah, sure. But this program is at the very top of the sport because of the head coach."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	4	**JEREMIAH SMITH (SO.)**	11	Quincy Porter (Fr.)
WR	17	**CARNELL TATE (JR.)**	13	Bryson Rodgers (So.)
WR	1	Brandon Inniss (Jr.)	5	Mylan Graham (Fr.)
LT	78	Ethan Onianwa (Sr.)	69	Ian Moore (Fr.)
LG	51	Luke Montgomery (Jr.)	76	Jake Cook (Fr.)
C	75	**CARSON HINZMAN (JR.)**	62	Joshua Padilla (So.)
RG	77	**TEGRA TSHABOLA (JR.)**	58	Gabe VanSickle (Fr.)
RT	67	**AUSTIN SIEREVELD (SO.)**	70	Phillip Daniels (So.)
TE	86	Max Klare (Jr.)	89	Will Kacmarek (Sr.)
QB	10	Julian Sayin (Fr.)	3	Lincoln Kienholz (So.)
RB	20	James Peoples (So.)	12	CJ Donaldson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr. (Jr.)	48	Logan George (Jr.)
DT	96	Eddrick Houston (So.)	94	Jason Moore (So.)
DT	98	Kayden McDonald (Jr.)	95	Tywone Malone Jr. (Sr.)
DE	92	Caden Curry (Sr.)		Beau Atkinson (Jr.)
MLB	8	Arvell Reese (Jr.)	26	Payton Pierce (So.)
WLB	6	**SONNY STYLES (SR.)**	11	C.J. Hicks (Sr.)
CB	1	**DAVISON IGBINOSUN (SR.)**	4	Devin Sanchez (Fr.)
CB	7	Jermaine Mathews Jr. (Jr.)	5	Aaron Scott Jr. (So.)
NB	3	Lorenzo Styles Jr. (Sr.)	13	Miles Lockhart (Fr.)
SS	9	Malik Hartford (Jr.)	18	Jaylen McClain (So.)
FS	2	**CALEB DOWNS (JR.)**	10	Faheem Delane (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Jayden Fielding (Sr.)	KR	1 Brandon Inniss (Jr.)
P	42	Joe McGuire (So.)	PR	2 Caleb Downs (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 3 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 14-2, 8-2 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Jeremiah Smith not only crushed several of Cris Carter's Ohio State freshman records in 2024, but he also cemented himself as one of the nation's top weapons. Now, the 6-foot-3 phenom will have to do it with a new quarterback and without the steady Emeka Egbuka on the other side. Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss will provide needed support — and former Purdue tight end Max Klare is another key target.

Julian Sayin appears to be QB1 ahead of mainstay Lincoln Kienholz, but he'll need to try to emulate the arm talent and accountability of predecessor Will Howard to earn full trust.

The run game is a bit of a mystery as several backs may play a role, and unproven James Peoples is the listed starter. The offensive line also is missing a couple NFL-worthy talents, but interior blockers Tegra Tshabola, Carson Hinzman and Luke Montgomery are battled-tested, and the coaches love the versatility of tackle Austin Siereveld.

DEFENSE Even with the loss of several standouts, the Buckeyes still will showcase one of college football's elite defenders in safety Caleb Downs, who anchors the back end. He'll have help in the secondary from Davison Igbinosun, a physical corner who seems to rise to big moments. Another cover man to watch is Jermaine Mathews Jr.

At linebacker, leading tackler Cody Simon was a fourth-round draft pick, but Sonny Styles and rising talent Arvell Reese give new defensive coordinator Matt Patricia some intriguing chess pieces.

Up front, the Buckeyes will try to build a new identity with C.J. Hicks as a featured performer, but OSU may need to dip into the portal for reinforcements.

SPECIALISTS The Buckeyes will try to end a 15-year drought on returning a kickoff for a touchdown, but top candidates still are emerging. Downs and Inniss are punt-return threats. Placekicker Jayden Fielding has been up-and-down but played admirably through nagging injuries last year. Joe McGuire (42.1 yards per punt) has been solid but not spectacular.

FINAL ANALYSIS The loss of talent is staggering, and in the vapor trail left behind are lots of questions. Are Sayin and new coordinator Brian Hartline ready to take over the offense? Who are difference-makers along the defensive line? Are the special teams an asset or liability? Is this the OSU team that finally ends the misery vs. Michigan? The rings have been dispersed and the celebration in Columbus has subsided; now it's time for head coach Ryan Day to find out who is ready to lead this program back to contention.

2024 RESULTS (14-2, 8-2 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Akron	W	52-6
Sept. 7	Western Michigan	W	56-0
Sept. 21	Marshall	W	49-14
Sept. 28	at Michigan State	W	38-7
Oct. 5	Iowa	W	35-7
Oct. 12	at Oregon	L	31-32
Oct. 26	Nebraska	W	21-17
Nov. 2	at Penn State	W	20-13
Nov. 9	Purdue	W	45-0
Nov. 16	at Northwestern	W	31-7
Nov. 23	Indiana	W	38-15
Nov. 30	Michigan	L	10-13
Dec. 21	Tennessee #	W	42-17
Jan. 1	vs. Oregon %	W	41-21
Jan. 10	vs. Texas &	W	28-14
Jan. 20	vs. Notre Dame $	W	34-23

#CFB Football Playoff First Round %Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal &Cotton Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal $Atlanta: CFB Playoff National Championship

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Texas
Sept. 6	Grambling
Sept. 13	Ohio
Sept. 27	at Washington
Oct. 4	Minnesota
Oct. 11	at Illinois
Oct. 18	at Wisconsin
Nov. 1	Penn State
Nov. 8	at Purdue
Nov. 15	UCLA
Nov. 22	Rutgers
Nov. 29	at Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Quincy Porter, WR	★★★★★
2.	Devin Sanchez, CB	★★★★★
3.	Tavien St. Clair, QB	★★★★★
4.	Riley Pettijohn, LB	★★★★
5.	Faheem Delane, S	★★★★
6.	Carter Lowe, OT	★★★★
7.	Bo Jackson, RB	★★★★
8.	Brody Lennon, TE	★★★★
9.	Jarquez Carter, DL	★★★★
10.	Zion Grady, EDGE	★★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Day • Record at School: 70-10 (6+ years)
Career Record: 70-10 (6+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brian Hartline
Defensive Coordinator: Matt Patricia • Location: Columbus, Ohio
Stadium: Ohio Stadium (102,780)

OREGON DUCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 9 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 13-1, 9-0 BIG TEN

OFFENSE After three years featuring a high-profile portal addition at quarterback in Dillon Gabriel, the Ducks are expected to hand the keys to their offense to sophomore Dante Moore. He shared starting duties at UCLA in 2023 and then transferred to the school he originally committed to out of high school — Oregon. His physical gifts have never been questioned, and after a mental reset while redshirting last year, Moore has been drawing rave reviews from his new teammates.

He'll have a ton of weapons around him, including the top running back in the portal, Tulane transfer Makhi Hughes, who rushed for 1,401 yards and 15 touchdowns last season; a breakout star in tight end Kenyon Sadiq; and a receiver room led by explosive senior Evan Stewart and dynamic freshman Dakorien Moore.

A key will be getting an offensive line featuring four new starters to jell quickly, but all the newcomers are seniors.

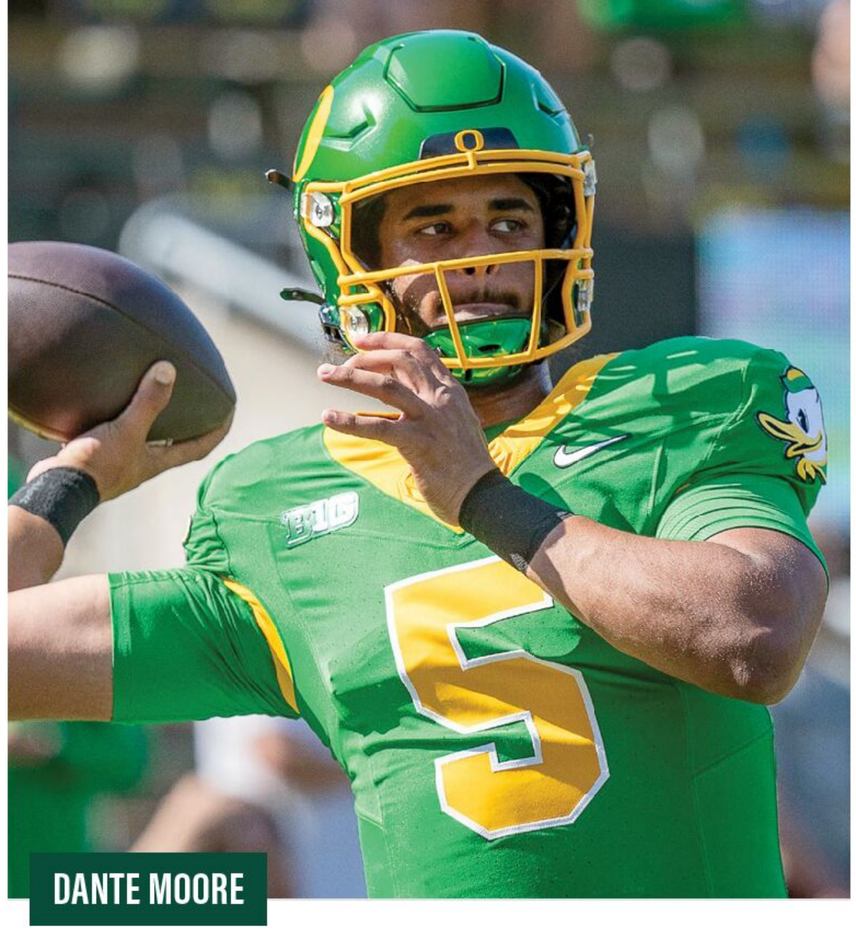
DEFENSE A school known for its offensive prowess has seen its defense begin to even the scales under head coach Dan Lanning. Given the losses on that side of the ball this offseason, that trend will be tested, as Oregon moves on without the likes of defensive lineman Derrick Harmon, linebacker Jeffrey Bassa and cornerback Jabbar Muhammad.

The strength this season is on the edge, where Matayo Uiagalelei and Teitum Tuioti should form one of the best pass-rushing tandems in the country. Up the middle, the Ducks will need guys like Bear Alexander, A'Mauri Washington and Devon Jackson to come into their own as full-time contributors.

The secondary is filled with new faces, led by Purdue transfer Dillon Thieneman, but Oregon has been outstanding in recent years at integrating newcomers on the back end without a hitch.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Atticus Sappington and punter Ross James both are back in the fold, as is kickoff returner Noah Whittington. Gary Bryant Jr. will look to step into the shoes of punt returner Tez Johnson and also help replace him as a slot receiver along with the freshman Moore.

FINAL ANALYSIS An unbeaten run to the Big Ten title as first-year members of the league came crashing back to earth for Oregon with its lopsided College Football Playoff loss to a highly motivated, exceptionally talented Ohio State team. Given the loss of so many experienced contributors, the ceiling doesn't feel as high for this Oregon team as the 2024 group, but conference title contention and a playoff berth are the new standard for the Ducks under Lanning.



DANTE MOORE

SCOUTING THE DUCKS

"They're pretty hyped on the quarterback [Dante Moore], who they've had in the system for a season already, which is a huge advantage. This isn't modifying your book for a guy you get out of the portal; it's a talented, developed player who already knows your system. I think that will show early on this season. ... They lost some legit linebackers and a receiver, but this is a reload program, not a rebuilder. Oregon is one of the elite talent-evaluating programs in the country. ... The only thing missing for [Dan] Lanning is the hardware. Up until the Rose Bowl, the big games he lost were situational decisions where you still respected his confidence for making risky calls. They're in the mix to win it all."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)					
WR	3	Kyler Kasper (Jr.)	4	Malik Benson (Sr.)
WR	1	Dakorien Moore (Fr.)	2	Gary Bryant Jr. (Sr.)
WR	**7**	**EVAN STEWART (SR.)**	14	Justius Lowe (Jr.)
LT	76	Isaiah World (Sr.)	58	Ziyare Addison (Fr.)
LG	75	Emmanuel Pregnon (Sr.)	73	Kawika Rogers (Jr.)
C	**72**	**IAPANI LALOULU (JR.)**	70	Charlie Pickard (Sr.)
RG	77	Matthew Bedford (Sr.)	74	Dave Iuli (Jr.)
RT	71	Alex Harkey (Sr.)	78	Gernorris Wilson (So.)
TE	18	Kenyon Sadiq (Jr.)	9	Jamari Johnson (So.)
QB	5	Dante Moore (So.)	16	Austin Novosad (So.)
RB	20	Makhi Hughes (Jr.)	6	Noah Whittington (Sr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	42	Aydin Breland (Fr.)	29	Ashton Porter (So.)
DT	1	Bear Alexander (Jr.)	50	Tionne Gray (Fr.)
DT	52	A'Mauri Washington (Jr.)	99	Terrance Green (So.)
EDGE	**10**	**MATAYO UIAGALELEI (JR.)**	47	Elijah Rushing (Fr.)
ILB	**28**	**BRYCE BOETTCHER (SR.)**	54	Jerry Mixon (Jr.)
ILB	26	Devon Jackson (Jr.)	33	Kamar Mothudi (Fr.)
EDGE	**44**	**TEITUM TUIOTI (JR.)**	17	Blake Purchase (So.)
CB	5	Theran Johnson (Sr.)	**6**	**JAHLIL FLORENCE (JR.)**
CB	3	Sione Laulea (Jr.)	7	Ify Obidegwu (Fr.)
NB	22	Jadon Canady (Sr.)	0	Daylen Austin (So.)
S	31	Dillon Thieneman (Jr.)	2	Kingston Lopa (Fr.)
S	12	Peyton Woodyard (So.)	21	Aaron Flowers (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	36	Atticus Sappington (Sr.)	KR	6	Noah Whittington (Sr.)
P	92	Ross James (Sr.)	PR	2	Gary Bryant Jr. (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (13-1, 9-0 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Idaho	W	24-14
Sept. 7	Boise State	W	37-34
Sept. 14	at Oregon State	W	49-14
Sept. 28	at UCLA	W	34-13
Oct. 4	Michigan State	W	31-10
Oct. 12	Ohio State	W	32-31
Oct. 18	at Purdue	W	35-0
Oct. 26	Illinois	W	38-9
Nov. 2	at Michigan	W	38-17
Nov. 9	Maryland	W	39-18
Nov. 16	at Wisconsin	W	16-13
Nov. 30	Washington	W	49-21
Dec. 7	vs. Penn State #	W	45-37
Jan. 1	vs. Ohio State %	L	21-41

#Indianapolis %Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Montana State
Sept. 6	Oklahoma State
Sept. 13	at Northwestern
Sept. 20	Oregon State
Sept. 27	at Penn State
Oct. 11	Indiana
Oct. 18	at Rutgers
Oct. 25	Wisconsin
Nov. 8	at Iowa
Nov. 15	Minnesota
Nov. 22	USC
Nov. 29	at Washington

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

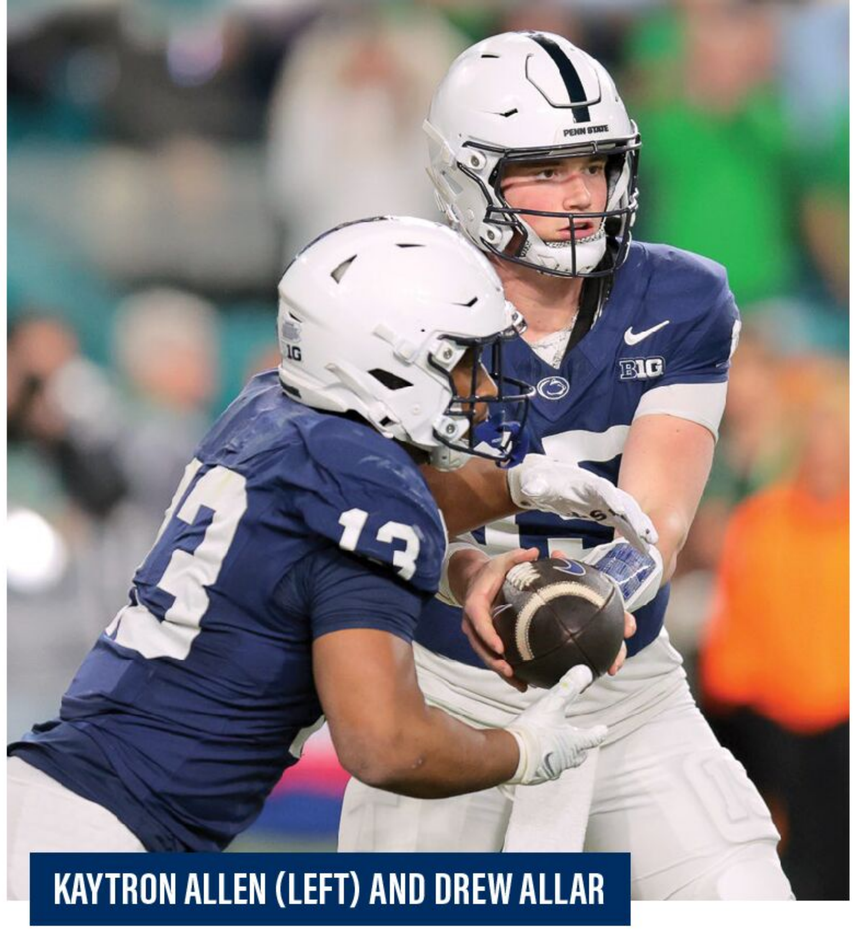
1.	Dakorien Moore, WR	★★★★★
2.	Na'eem Offord, CB	★★★★★
3.	Trey McNutt, S	★★★★★
4.	Zac Stascausky, OT	★★★★
5.	Brandon Finney Jr., CB	★★★★
6.	Dorian Brew, CB	★★★★
7.	Dierre Hill Jr., RB	★★★★
8.	Vander Ploog, TE	★★★★
9.	Matthew Johnson, DL	★★★★
10.	Cooper Perry, WR	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dan Lanning • Record at School: 35-6 (3 years)
Career Record: 35-6 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Will Stein
Defensive Coordinator: Tosh Lupoi • Location: Eugene, Ore.
Stadium: Autzen Stadium (54,000)

BEN LONERGAN/THE REGISTER-GUARD



KAYTRON ALLEN (LEFT) AND DREW ALLAR

SCOUTING THE NITTANY LIONS

"This is the best roster in [James] Franklin's time there, and they're probably a favorite to win the league entering the season. ... [Jim] Knowles is a smart addition; he's going to make some of those guys standout players. Watch out for the defensive end [Dani Dennis-Sutton] in his schemes. I think they're going to be really creative in how they use him. ... They're national title contenders because of the backfield. It would be hard to find a better overall group than [Drew] Allar and the two backs. ... The Troy receiver [Devonte Ross] gives them some additional speed and opens them up. ... This is the season James Franklin's entire coaching career could be judged by. If they can't change their big-game problems with this group, it's not happening."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	5	Devonte Ross (Sr.)	7	Kaden Saunders (Jr.)
WR	11	Kyron Hudson (Sr.)	4	Tyseer Denmark (Fr.)
WR		Trebor Pena (Sr.)	**2**	**LIAM CLIFFORD (SR.)**
LT	**66**	**DREW SHELTON (SR.)**	74	J'ven Williams (So.)
LG	**71**	**OLAIVAVEGA IOANE (JR.)**	55	Chimdy Onoh (So.)
C	**53**	**NICK DAWKINS (SR.)**	52	Dominic Rulli (Jr.)
RG	50	Cooper Cousins (So.)	63	Alex Birchmeier (So.)
RT	72	Nolan Rucci (Sr.)	**68**	**ANTHONY DONKOH (SO.)**
TE	16	Khalil Dinkins (Sr.)	85	Luke Reynolds (So.)
QB	**15**	**DREW ALLAR (SR.)**	17	Ethan Grunkemeyer (Fr.)
RB	**10**	**NICHOLAS SINGLETON (SR.)**	13	Kaytron Allen (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**33**	**DANI DENNIS-SUTTON (SR.)**	18	Max Granville (Fr.)
DT	**28**	**ZANE DURANT (SR.)**	54	Xavier Gilliam (Fr.)
DT	50	Alonzo Ford Jr. (Sr.)	39	Ty Blanding (So.)
DE	36	Zuriah Fisher (Sr.)	44	Jaylen Harvey (Fr.)
LB	0	Dominic DeLuca (Sr.)	8	DaKaari Nelson (So.)
LB	**13**	**TONY ROJAS (JR.)**	40	Anthony Speca (Fr.)
CB	**4**	**A.J. HARRIS (JR.)**	2	Audavion Collins (Jr.)
CB	9	Elliot Washington II (Jr.)	7	Zion Tracy (Jr.)
NB	7	Zion Tracy (Jr.)	16	King Mack (Jr.)
S	**6**	**ZAKEE WHEATLEY (SR.)**	3	Antoine Belgrave-Shorter (Fr.)
S	10	Dejuan Lane (So.)	21	Vaboue Toure (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Ryan Barker (So.)	KR	10	Nicholas Singleton (Sr.)
P	95	Riley Thompson (Sr.)	PR	5	Devonte Ross (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAM NAVARRO-IMAGN IMAGES

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 2 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 13-3, 8-1 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Quarterback Drew Allar was great in the regular season (73.7% completion rate, 169.7 efficiency rating) and pedestrian in the playoff, where his completion rate didn't top 60%. Asked where Allar needed to improve, Penn State head coach James Franklin said, "It's all of it."

Offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki wrapped the 2024 passing game around Mackey Award-winning tight end Tyler Warren, who caught a program-record 104 passes. Penn State's top six wide receivers combined for 102, prompting a position-room renovation. Penn State needs transfers Kyron Hudson (USC), Trebor Pena (Syracuse) and Devonte Ross (Troy) to provide answers. Sophomore Luke Reynolds has some of Warren's athletic toolkit and will play alongside the underrated Khalil Dinkins in two-tight-end sets.

The backfield shapes up as one of the nation's best, with 1,000-yard rushers Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen playing their fourth season together. Amazingly, both players could break Evan Royster's career-rushing record of 3,932 yards behind an offensive line that returns four starters.

DEFENSE What did Franklin do when defensive coordinator Tom Allen left for Clemson? He gave former Ohio State DC Jim Knowles the largest assistant's contract in college football. Knowles says Penn State is "so close to winning it all. I think I can help."

Penn State is loaded at defensive end, with Dani Dennis-Sutton poised to become the next All-American and redshirt freshman Max Granville primed to follow him. Fifth-year senior safety Zakee Wheatley (five career interceptions) and cornerback A.J. Harris are high-end NFL prospects, as is underrated tackle Zane Durant. The Nittany Lions need a middle linebacker, more depth at tackle and a player to fill the hybrid "Jack" position. Nevertheless, the defense could be better than last season's.

SPECIALISTS The Nittany Lions bring back their starting kicker, punter, long-snapper, kickoff specialist and both returners. Walk-on Ryan Barker was among the team's best stories last season, taking over the kicking role in Week 5 and making 15 of his 18 field-goal attempts.

FINAL ANALYSIS Franklin has been "all-in" on building a national championship team at Penn State since 2014. He finally has the horsepower to do it. Athletic director Dr. Patrick Kraft is willing to fund a contender; he even suggested over the winter that Penn State needed to find another transfer receiver. Every offseason move Penn State made hinged on winning a title. This season represents the team's best chance so far under Franklin.

2024 RESULTS (13-3, 8-1 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	at West Virginia	W	34-12
Sept. 7	Bowling Green	W	34-27
Sept. 21	Kent State	W	56-0
Sept. 28	Illinois	W	21-7
Oct. 5	UCLA	W	27-11
Oct. 12	at USC (ot)	W	33-30
Oct. 26	at Wisconsin	W	28-13
Nov. 2	Ohio State	L	13-20
Nov. 9	Washington	W	35-6
Nov. 16	at Purdue	W	49-10
Nov. 23	at Minnesota	W	26-25
Nov. 30	Maryland	W	44-7
Dec. 7	vs. Oregon #	L	37-45
Dec. 21	SMU %	W	38-10
Dec. 31	vs. Boise State &	W	31-14
Jan. 9	vs. Notre Dame !	L	24-27

#Indianapolis %CFB Playoff First Round &Fiesta Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal !Orange Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Nevada
Sept. 6	FIU
Sept. 13	Villanova
Sept. 27	Oregon
Oct. 4	at UCLA
Oct. 11	Northwestern
Oct. 18	at Iowa
Nov. 1	at Ohio State
Nov. 8	Indiana
Nov. 15	at Michigan State
Nov. 22	Nebraska
Nov. 29	at Rutgers

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Andrew Olesh, TE	★★★★★
2.	Malachi Goodman, OT	★★★★
3.	Chaz Coleman, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Matt Henderson, TE	★★★★
5.	Brian Kortovich, TE	★★★★
6.	Jahmir Joseph, CB	★★★★
7.	Alex Tatsch, LB	★★★★
8.	LaVar Arrington II, LB	★★★★
9.	Matt Outten, ATH	★★★★
10.	Dayshaun Burnett, EDGE	★★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: James Franklin • Record at School: 101-42 (11 years)
Career Record: 125-57 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Andy Kotelnicki
Defensive Coordinator: Jim Knowles • Location: University Park, Pa.
Stadium: Beaver Stadium (106,572)

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 104 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 18 | 2024 RECORD: 1-11, 0-9 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Purdue may have gotten an answer at quarterback in late April after none of the three contenders impressed in the spring. Ryan Browne, last season's backup who also started two games in relief, transferred back to the place he called "home" after a few months at North Carolina.

Running back is a rare position with a proven commodity: Devin Mockobee. He's back for his final season in an offense that wants to run the ball. Malachi Thomas arrives from Virginia Tech to provide a proven backup and change of pace.

Questions loom at tight end. Is George Burhenn ready to emerge? He suffered a bad ankle injury in the spring. Even more questions loom at receiver. The staff imported five wideouts from the portal after five departed. The best of the bunch could be UCF's Chauncey Magwood or USC's Charles Ross. The best of the holdovers is likely De'Nylon Morrissette.

The line must be totally rebuilt. The anchor may be UNLV transfer Jalen St. John. If he isn't the alpha blocker, Joey Tanona may be. Rangy tackle Bakyne Coly could be sitting on the precipice of a breakout.

DEFENSE Who will rush the passer with Kydran Jenkins gone? CJ Madden is back after his 2024 season was limited to three games due to an ankle injury. The staff has landed two portal rushers in CJ Nunnally IV (Akron) and Breeon Ishmail (Michigan). Transfers TJ Lindsey (Auburn) and Marcus Moore (Bowling Green) anchor the interior. Jamarrion Harkless, Demeco Kennedy and Jamarius Dinkins need to play well inside.

Following a familiar theme, the staff took steps toward improvement at linebacker by adding transfers. The name to know: Sanders Ellis (FCS Tennessee State). Alex Sanford Jr. (Arkansas) and Mani Powell (UNLV) also will be factors. One holdover to watch is Winston Berglund.

Transfers have gutted the secondary. Dillon Thieneman, one of a staggering 10 DBs to exit via the portal, bolted to Oregon. In response, the staff has added six portal defensive backs. Tony Grimes (UNLV) may be the top corner, while Crew Wakley (BYU) looks like the No. 1 safety.

SPECIALISTS Spencer Porath is back as the No. 1 kicker following a spotty debut. He'll need to be better after connecting on only 7-of-11 field-goal attempts. The staff fished Arkansas' Sam Dubwig from the portal to punt, although he never has punted in a college game.

FINAL ANALYSIS Purdue is in full rebuild mode under first-year head coach Barry Odom, who arrived to clean up a 1-11 mess after a successful two-year run at UNLV in which he won 19 games. The hurdles? They are many, including a daunting schedule that will challenge an overhauled roster. We'll see if the Boilermakers can win more than two games.

2024 RESULTS (1-11, 0-9 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Indiana State	W	49-0
Sept. 14	Notre Dame	L	7-66
Sept. 21	at Oregon State	L	21-38
Sept. 28	Nebraska	L	10-28
Oct. 5	at Wisconsin	L	6-52
Oct. 12	at Illinois (ot)	L	49-50
Oct. 18	Oregon	L	0-35
Nov. 2	Northwestern (ot)	L	20-26
Nov. 9	at Ohio State	L	0-45
Nov. 16	Penn State	L	10-49
Nov. 22	at Michigan State	L	17-24
Nov. 30	at Indiana	L	0-66

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Ball State
Sept. 6	Southern Illinois
Sept. 13	USC
Sept. 20	at Notre Dame
Oct. 4	Illinois
Oct. 11	at Minnesota
Oct. 18	at Northwestern
Oct. 25	Rutgers
Nov. 1	at Michigan
Nov. 8	Ohio State
Nov. 15	at Washington
Nov. 29	Indiana

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaron Thomas, ATH	★★★★
2.	Zyntreacs Otey, CB	★★★
3.	Ziaire Stevens, RB	★★★
4.	Antonio Parker, S	★★★
5.	Maxwell Barbee, ATH	★★★
6.	Landon Brooks, EDGE	★★★
7.	Sam Steward, LB	★★★
8.	Jon Grimmett, TE	★★★
9.	Rashad Jones, EDGE	★★★
10.	Mason Alnutt, EDGE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Barry Odom • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 44-33 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Josh Henson • Defensive Coordinator: Mike Scherer • Location: West Lafayette, Ind. • Stadium: Ross-Ade Stadium (61,441)

DEVIN MOCKOBEE

SCOUTING THE BOILERMAKERS

"This is a really tough rebuild, and it's not going to be an add-NIL, instant-win situation like Indiana was. ... Barry [Odom] is going to be a steadier hand than Ryan [Walters]; he brings a lot of experience in and knows how to sustain a program. If you're looking for something to build on this season, it's line play on both sides. [Josh] Henson is a good offensive mind and a good OL coach, too. ... They're still pulling guys in from the portal and auditioning at spots right now. They don't have a quarterback settled, and they don't really have a receiving corps. It's going to be rough for a while, but they're banking on the more experienced head coach being able to compete long-term in the league. How do they respond to what Indiana's doing with NIL? That's the bigger question than anything on the field."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	8	De'Nylon Morrissette (Jr.)	9	Isaiah Myers (Jr.)
WR	5	Chauncey Magwood (Sr.)	6	Arhmad Branch (So.)
WR	4	Charles Ross (Sr.)	13	EJ Horton Jr. (Sr.)
LT	79	Joey Tanona (Jr.)	50	John Randle Jr. (Fr.)
LG	74	Jalen St. John (Sr.)	58	Hank Purvis (So.)
C	62	Giordano Vaccaro (Sr.)	76	Ethan Trent (So.)
RG	51	Mason Vicari (So.)	70	Max Parrott (Fr.)
RT	78	Bakyne Coly (Sr.)		Tyrell Green (So.)
TE	81	George Burhenn (So.)	82	Christian Earls (Sr.)
QB		Ryan Browne (So.)	3	Malachi Singleton (So.)
RB	45	**DEVIN MOCKOBEE (SR.)**	24	Malachi Thomas (Sr.)

DEFENSE (0)

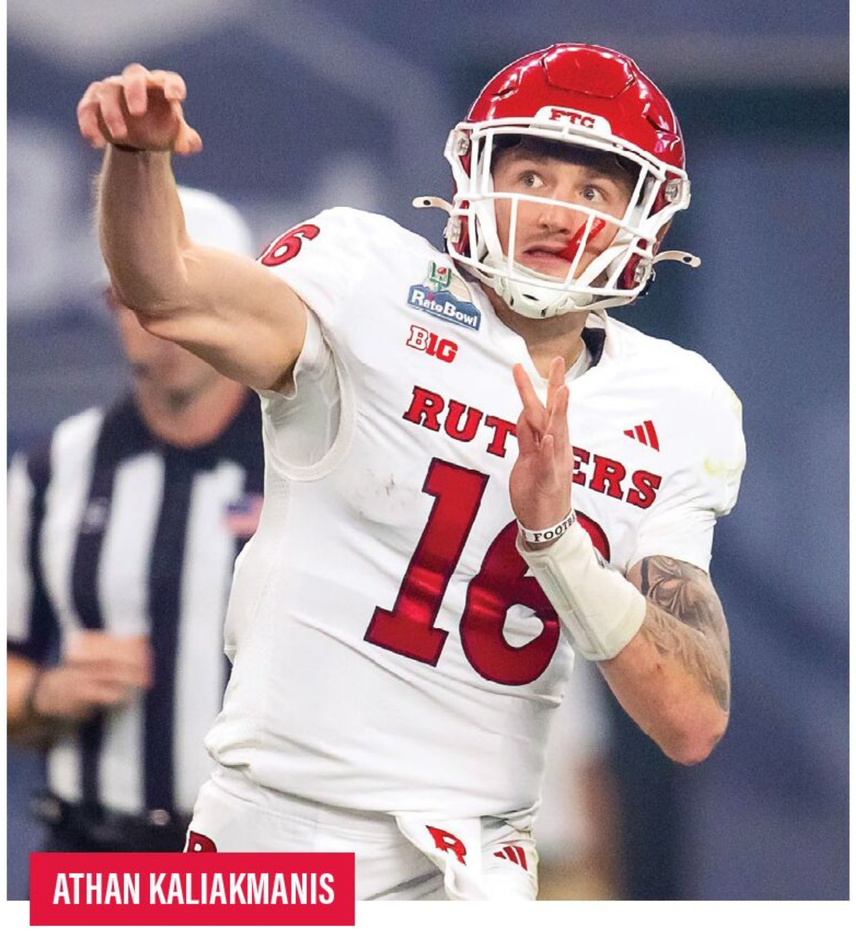
DE	23	Trey Smith (So.)	91	CJ Nunnally IV (Sr.)
DT		Marcus Moore Jr. (Jr.)	97	Jamarrion Harkless (So.)
DT	13	TJ Lindsey (Fr.)	55	Jamarius Dinkins (Sr.)
DE	8	CJ Madden (Jr.)	58	Breeon Ishmail (So.)
LB	16	Mani Powell (Sr.)	20	Winston Berglund (So.)
LB		Sanders Ellis (So.)	10	Alex Sanford Jr. (Jr.)
CB	0	Tony Grimes (Sr.)	24	Chad Brown (Sr.)
CB	12	Ryan Turner (Jr.)	4	Hudauri Hines (So.)
NB	3	Sterling Smith (Jr.)	1	Smiley Bradford (So.)
S	21	Tahj Ra-El (Sr.)	2	Richard Toney Jr. (Sr.)
S	7	Crew Wakley (Sr.)	32	D'Mon Marable (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Spencer Porath (So.)	KR	24	Malachi Thomas (Sr.)
P	95	Sam Dubwig (Fr.)	PR	24	Malachi Thomas (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JEFF HANISCH-IMAGN IMAGES



ATHAN KALIAKMANIS

SCOUTING THE SCARLET KNIGHTS

"The quarterback returning is big; that offensive system showed some promise last year. I think they're a stable program now, but it's hard to predict they'll make that next step up because a lot of the key position group needs are being filled by portal guys. There isn't a culture issue we know of; I think it's just a case of the have-nots, and guys are getting bigger offers to go other places. ... They're really high on some of the young receivers, and in Kirk Ciarrocca's system, they could break out this year. ... Overall, they're probably on par with the last few seasons. This is a very smart, capable coaching staff. It's going to take a different approach in personnel for them to build the depth and talent level necessary to win more games in this league."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	0	DT Sheffield (Sr.)	4	Jourdin Houston (Fr.)
WR	9	**IAN STRONG (JR.)**	2	Ben Black (So.)
WR	8	KJ Duff (So.)	1	Famah Toure (So.)
LT	56	**TYLER NEEDHAM (SR.)**	61	Emir Stinette (So.)
LG	65	**BRYAN FELTER (SR.)**	76	Dantae Chin (Jr.)
C	59	**GUS ZILINSKAS (SR.)**	73	Terrence Salami (Sr.)
RG	69	**KWABENA ASAMOAH (JR.)**	55	Nick Oliveira (So.)
RT	63	**TAJ WHITE (JR.)**		Moshood Giwa (So.)
TE	12	**KENNY FLETCHER JR. (SR.)**	18	Colin Weber (Sr.)
QB	16	**ATHAN KALIAKMANIS (SR.)**	10	AJ Surace (Fr.)
RB	5	CJ Campbell Jr. (Sr.)	3	Antwan Raymond (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	99	Eric O'Neill (Sr.)	8	Jordan Walker (Sr.)
DT	55	Zaire Angoy (Sr.)	0	Doug Blue-Eli (Sr.)
DT	96	Keshon Griffin (Sr.)		Oliver Billotte (Sr.)
DE	94	Bradley Weaver (Sr.)	14	**JORDAN THOMPSON (SR.)**
LB	28	**DARIEL DJABOME (JR.)**	4	Sam Robinson (Fr.)
LB	2	Moses Walker (Sr.)	13	DJ McClary (Fr.)
CB	7	Cam Miller (Sr.)	10	Jacobie Henderson (Sr.)
CB	21	Al-Shadee Salaam (Sr.)	24	Kevin Levy (So.)
NB	2	Bo Mascoe (So.)	27	Sage Clawges (So.)
S	5	Kaj Sanders (So.)	16	Jessie Ofurie (Jr.)
S	9	Jett Elad (Sr.)	38	Timmy Ward (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Jai Patel (Jr.)	KR	2 Ben Black (So.)
P	94	Jakob Anderson (So.)	PR	2 Ben Black (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 43 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE After putting together its best offensive season in a decade last fall, Rutgers returns many of the key players from that unit. Athan Kaliakmanis, the first Scarlet Knights quarterback to throw for 2,000-plus yards since 2015, is back for his second season. Star running back Kyle Monangai is headed to the NFL, but his protégé Antwan Raymond is back after a promising true freshman season; Rutgers also added dynamic Florida Atlantic transfer CJ Campbell Jr. Leading receiver Dymere Miller graduated, but North Texas transfer DT Sheffield will fill in for him; meanwhile, budding star receivers Ian Strong and KJ Duff should see bigger roles, as will promising prospect Ben Black.

The offensive line, which has improved every season under heralded position coach Pat Flaherty, has questions. The interior is set with starters Bryan Felter, Gus Zilinskas and Kwabena Asamoah, but the departure of stalwart left tackle Hollin Pierce will force some shuffling on the ends. Right tackle Tyler Needham is likely to flip to the left side.

DEFENSE The Scarlet Knights will have all new starters in the secondary, with Penn State transfer Cam Miller set to start at cornerback alongside longtime Scarlet Knights Al-Shadee Salaam and Bo Mascoe and UNLV transfer Jett Elad expected to join holdover Kaj Sanders at safety.

The interior defensive line has some continuity, with returning contributors Zaire Angoy and Keshon Griffin expected to bump up to starters, while the ends have received a significant upgrade — at least on paper. Transfers Eric O'Neill (James Madison) and Bradley Weaver (Ohio) were highly productive at the Group of 5 level, and the Scarlet Knights hope that will translate to the Big Ten and culminate in a productive pass rush.

The linebacker spot is in flux. Dariel Djabome is set to start after being thrown into the fire a year ago, but there is plenty of youth and a new position coach leading the group — former James Madison assistant Zach Sparber, one of five new position coaches on the defensive side.

SPECIALISTS Rutgers returns the same kicker (Jai Patel) and punter (Jakob Anderson), both of whom have proven to be reliable. Changes at returner should not be notable; Rutgers returned only 14 kicks last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Rutgers should take another step forward offensively with all of its returning talent at the skill positions, but the ceiling will be determined by how smoothly the changes at left and right tackle take hold. Despite a lot of new faces, the defense should improve after an injury-riddled season. Ultimately, the Scarlet Knights could be a better team but, because of a significantly harder schedule, could end up with a worse record. All things considered, a bowl bid is a reasonable expectation.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Aug. 29	Howard	W	44-7
Sept. 7	Akron	W	49-17
Sept. 21	at Virginia Tech	W	26-23
Sept. 27	Washington	W	21-18
Oct. 5	at Nebraska	L	7-14
Oct. 12	Wisconsin	L	7-42
Oct. 19	UCLA	L	32-35
Oct. 25	at USC	L	20-42
Nov. 9	Minnesota	W	26-19
Nov. 16	at Maryland	W	31-17
Nov. 23	Illinois	L	31-38
Nov. 30	at Michigan State	W	41-14
Dec. 26	vs. Kansas State #	L	41-44

#Rate Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Ohio
Sept. 6	Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 13	Norfolk State
Sept. 20	Iowa
Sept. 27	at Minnesota
Oct. 11	at Washington
Oct. 18	Oregon
Oct. 25	at Purdue
Nov. 1	at Illinois
Nov. 8	Maryland
Nov. 22	at Ohio State
Nov. 29	Penn State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tariq Hayer, S	★★★★
2.	Robbie Johnson Jr., DL	★★★★
3.	Miron Gurman, IOL	★★★★
4.	Michael Clayton, CB	★★★
5.	Braxton Kyle, DL	★★★
6.	N-Kye Wynn, IOL	★★★
7.	Talibi Kaba, LB	★★★
8.	Ben Rothhaar, TE	★★★
9.	DJ McClary, LB	★★★
10.	Kamar Archie, LB	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Greg Schiano • Record at School: 94-101 (16 years)
Career Record: 94-101 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kirk Ciarrocca
Defensive Coordinators: Robb Smith, Zach Sparber
Location: New Brunswick, N.J. • Stadium: SHI Stadium (52,454)

UCLA BRUINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 62 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 15 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Entering Year 2, head coach DeShaun Foster placed a bigger stamp on the roster and the coaching staff, plucking Tino Sunseri from Indiana to be offensive coordinator.

UCLA's quarterback and team outlook changed dramatically late in spring practice as transfer Nico Iamaleava joined the program following a highly publicized falling out with Tennessee over NIL money, triggering projected starter Joey Aguilar to transfer to Tennessee. Iamaleava, whose younger brother Madden followed him to L.A. and will be his backup, will target a mostly new receiving corps, which returns Kwazi Gilmer and Titus Mokiao-Atimalala, as UCLA added transfers such as Mikey Matthews (Cal) and Jaedon Wilson (Arkansas). Tight end Hudson Habermehl is back after missing 2024 with an ACL tear.

UCLA also hit the portal for versatile offensive linemen headlined by Courtland Ford (Kentucky), Julian Armella (Florida State) and Eugene Brooks (Oklahoma). They join veteran tackle Garrett DiGiorgio and Sam Yoon, who finished last season as the starting center.

The team finished 132nd nationally in rushing last fall, but Cal transfer Jaivian Thomas is a welcome addition, and Foster, a former NFL running back, is excited by the potential of journeyman Jalen Berger.

DEFENSE Foster overhauled most of the defensive staff but retained coordinator Ikaika Malloe, who has overseen a line that helped UCLA rank among the top six nationally in run defense during the past two seasons. Siale Taupaki and Devin Aupiu are among the key returnees up front.

UCLA bids farewell to standout All-America selection Carson Schwesinger and All-Big Ten selection Kain Medrano at linebacker, but Foster likes the potential there with Jalen Woods and JonJon Vaughns back and Oregon State transfer Isaiah Chisom arriving.

The secondary is transfer-heavy with veterans Bryon Threats (UCF), Key Lawrence (Ole Miss), Ben Perry (Louisville) and Andre Jordan Jr. (Oregon State) and younger players like Miami (Fla.) import Robert Stafford.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Mateen Bhaghani was perfect on field goals from inside 40 yards last season and 20-of-24 overall. Punter Brody Richter transferred, so Bhaghani might have to pull double duty. Matthews will be a factor on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Foster's first team showed impressive fight during the second half of the season. His second team looks significantly different, but if he made the right choices with transfers and assistants, UCLA could become a sleeper team in the Big Ten. UCLA will need more firepower from its offense, as the schedule once again has few letups.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	at Hawai'i	W	16-13
Sept. 14	Indiana	L	13-42
Sept. 21	at LSU	L	17-34
Sept. 28	Oregon	L	13-34
Oct. 5	at Penn State	L	11-27
Oct. 12	Minnesota	L	17-21
Oct. 19	at Rutgers	W	35-32
Nov. 2	at Nebraska	W	27-20
Nov. 8	Iowa	W	20-17
Nov. 15	at Washington	L	19-31
Nov. 23	USC	L	13-19
Nov. 30	Fresno State	W	20-13

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Utah
Sept. 6	at UNLV
Sept. 13	New Mexico
Sept. 27	at Northwestern
Oct. 4	Penn State
Oct. 11	at Michigan State
Oct. 18	Maryland
Oct. 25	at Indiana
Nov. 8	Nebraska
Nov. 15	at Ohio State
Nov. 22	Washington
Nov. 29	at USC

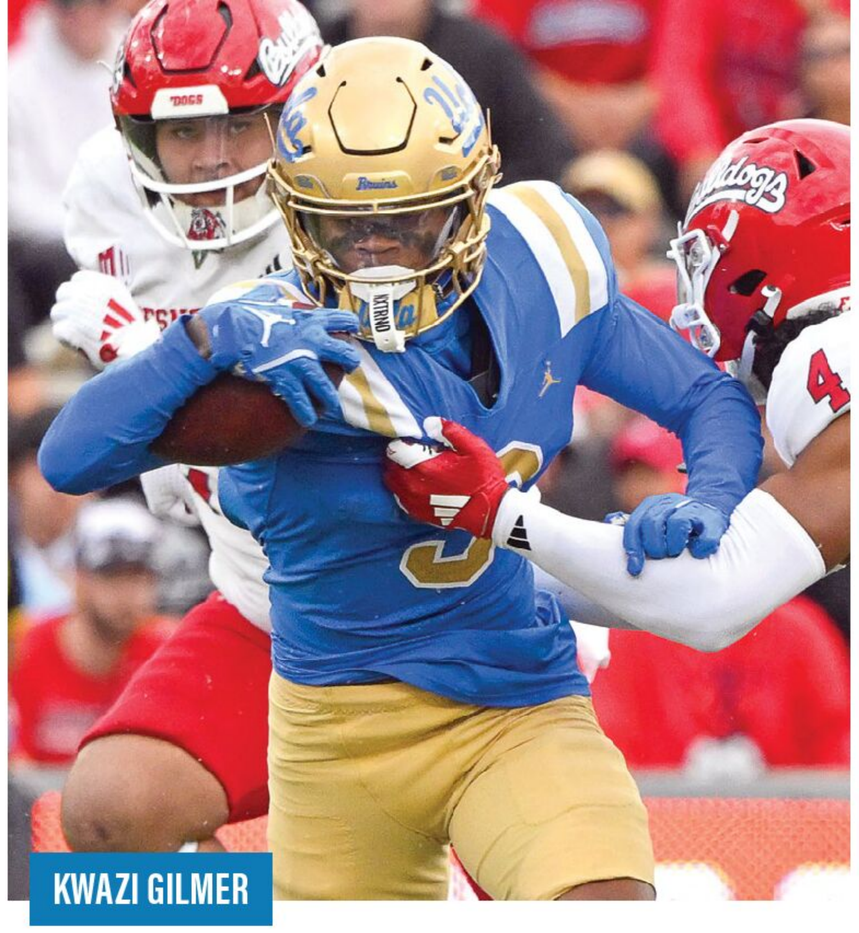
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Karson Cox, RB	★★★★
2.	Cole Cogshell, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Madden Iamaleava, QB	★★★★
4.	Lucien Holland, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Robert McDaniel, QB	★★★
6.	Jadyn Hudson, S	★★★
7.	Garrison Blank, OT	★★★
8.	Kuron Jabari Jr., CB	★★★
9.	LaRue Zamorano, CB	★★★
10.	Scott Taylor, EDGE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: DeShaun Foster • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 5-7 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Tino Sunseri
Defensive Coordinator: Ikaika Malloe • Location: Los Angeles, Calif. • Stadium: Rose Bowl (89,702)



KWAZI GILMER

SCOUTING THE BRUINS

"If Nico [Iamaleava] wasn't a local kid, I don't think these two end up together. It's going be fascinating to watch, and it's hard to understand if you're in Nico's camp. This is a less talented roster than Knoxville, and they're rebuilding the offensive line with portal guys and a new OL coach and coordinator. ... They portaled a lot of guys in on defense to make up for some major losses, so don't expect a major improvement there. ... This is a team with a ton of questions, an almost all-new staff and a superstar transfer at QB. They're going to steal a lot of attention from USC for a bit, but it's going to be a huge challenge for a young, unproven head coach to keep this from becoming a circus that falls apart."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	**KWAZI GILMER (SO.)**	2	**TITUS MOKIAO-ATIMALALA (SR.)**
WR	7	Mikey Matthews (Jr.)	1	**RICO FLORES JR. (JR.)**
WR	11	Jaedon Wilson (Sr.)	14	Carter Shaw (So.)
LT	77	Courtland Ford (Sr.)	63	K.D. Arnold (Jr.)
LG	55	Eugene Brooks (So.)	70	Caleb Walker (Sr.)
C	64	**SAM YOON (SR.)**	55	Eugene Brooks (So.)
RG	74	Julian Armella (Sr.)	55	Eugene Brooks (So.)
RT	72	**GARRETT DIGIORGIO (SR.)**	71	**REUBEN UNIJE (SR.)**
TE	81	Hudson Habermehl (Sr.)	28	Jack Pedersen (Jr.)
QB		Nico Iamaleava (So.)		Madden Iamaleava (Fr.)
RB		Jaivian Thomas (Jr.)	0	Jalen Berger (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	44	**DEVIN AUPIU (SR.)**	97	Jacob Busic (Jr.)
DT	92	**SIALE TAUPAKI (SR.)**	58	Gary Smith III (Sr.)
DT	99	**KEANU WILLIAMS (SR.)**	55	A.J. Fuimaono (So.)
DE	11	Nico Davillier (Sr.)	88	Grant Buckey (Jr.)
LB	9	Isaiah Chisom (Jr.)	10	Ben Perry (Sr.)
LB	17	Jalen Woods (Jr.)	21	JonJon Vaughns (Sr.)
CB	2	Andre Jordan Jr. (Jr.)	1	Kanye Clark (So.)
CB	3	Robert Stafford (So.)		Jamier Johnson (Sr.)
NB	28	Scooter Jackson (Jr.)	21	Cole Martin (So.)
S	4	Key Lawrence (Sr.)	22	Croix Stewart (Sr.)
S	2	Bryon Threats (Sr.)	18	Jadyn Hudson (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Mateen Bhaghani (Jr.)	KR	7	Mikey Matthews (Jr.)
P	94	Mateen Bhaghani (Jr.)	PR	7	Mikey Matthews (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ROBERT HANASHIRO-IMAGN IMAGES

JAYDEN MAIAVA

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"The talk is all about Lincoln [Riley] making another elite quarterback, but I think the metric here should be how much that defense can improve both on the field and in recruiting. I think they take a jump up this year because they're bringing in more talented players to a proven system. Both the transfers and the freshman [Jahkeem Stewart] will make the defensive line better. That's what gets lost about the USC teams that won big; they were killers in the front seven. That's been missing. ... If you assume [Jayden] Maiava continues to build a comfort level, they'll be better for it on offense. But watch the defense. If they take that next step, we're talking about a team that can go in and play with the best programs in the nation again."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	6	Makai Lemon (Jr.)	19	Xavier Jordan (Fr.)
WR	8	**JA'KOBI LANE (JR.)**	10	Corey Simms (Fr.)
WR	17	Prince Strachan (Jr.)	9	Jay Fair (Sr.)
LT	72	**ELIJAH PAIGE (SO.)**	74	Justin Tauanuu (Fr.)
LG	77	**ALANI NOA (JR.)**	59	Micah Banuelos (So.)
C	50	J'Onre Reed (Sr.)	67	Kilian O'Connor (Jr.)
RG	56	DJ Wingfield (Sr.)	78	Makai Saina (Fr.)
RT	73	Tobias Raymond (So.)	70	Aaron Dunn (Fr.)
TE	87	**LAKE MCREE (SR.)**	85	Walker Lyons (So.)
QB	14	Jayden Maiava (Jr.)	4	Husan Longstreet (So.)
RB	21	Bryan Jackson (So.)	1	Eli Sanders (Sr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	6	**ANTHONY LUCAS (SR.)**	26	Elijah Newby (Fr.)
DT	8	Devan Thompkins (Jr.)	4	Jahkeem Stewart (Fr.)
DT	9	Keeshawn Silver (Sr.)	94	Kobe Pepe (Sr.)
DE	10	Braylan Shelby (Jr.)	1	Kameryn Fountain (So.)
LB	23	Desman Stephens II (So.)	57	Roman Marchetti (Jr.)
LB	18	Eric Gentry (Sr.)	29	Garrison Madden (Jr.)
CB	2	DJ Harvey (Sr.)	38	Isaiah Rubin (Fr.)
CB	17	DeCarlos Nicholson (Sr.)	25	Marcelles Williams (Fr.)
NB	16	Prophet Brown (Sr.)	22	Braylon Conley (Fr.)
S	7	**KAMARI RAMSEY (JR.)**	15	Anthony Beavers Jr. (Sr.)
S	19	Bishop Fitzgerald (Sr.)	24	Christian Pierce (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	45	Caden Chittenden (So.)	KR 1	Eli Sanders (Sr.)
P	80	Sam Johnson (Sr.)	PR 6	Makai Lemon (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

USC TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 34 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Head coach Lincoln Riley wants to build at the line of scrimmage and has an offensive front with several homegrown prospects (Elijah Paige, Alani Noa) mixed with transfers (J'Onre Reed, DJ Wingfield). Paige earned Freshman All-America honors in 2024, while Wingfield's versatility and intelligence have stood out to Riley.

Quarterback Jayden Maiava went 3-1 after replacing Miller Moss and went through the offseason as the clear-cut starter. Riley saw "a lot of tremendous plays" from Maiava in 2024 and now wants to see the junior balance aggressiveness with ball security.

He will have two gifted targets in junior wide receivers Makai Lemon (764 receiving yards) and Ja'Kobi Lane (12 touchdowns). Boise State transfer Prince Strachan will also be part of the wideout rotation. Lake McRee once again leads the tight ends.

After two successful SEC transfers at running back (MarShawn Lloyd, Woody Marks), USC turns to one of its own in Bryan Jackson, who shined in the bowl win against Texas A&M. New Mexico transfer Eli Sanders and junior-college transfer Waymond Jordan round out the group.

DEFENSE USC has gotten much bigger along the line, which Riley expects to be a team strength. There's a good veteran core in Devan Thompkins, Braylan Shelby and Anthony Lucas, intriguing transfers like Keeshawn Silver and a splashy recruit in Jahkeem Stewart. "Across the board, interior, on the edge, the size, the strength, just the quality of depth and competition, you definitely feel that," Riley says.

Eric Gentry returns to lead the linebackers after concussions forced him to redshirt in 2024. First-year linebackers coach Rob Ryan will oversee a group that includes promising sophomore Desman Stephens II.

The secondary has some question marks outside of safety Kamari Ramsey, but transfers DJ Harvey (San José State) and Bishop Fitzgerald (NC State) will be factors.

SPECIALISTS USC will have a new kicker in Caden Chittenden, a Freshman All-American at UNLV, and a new punter in Sam Johnson, who replaces Ray Guy Award winner Eddie Czaplicki. Lemon handled kickoff returns in 2024 and might take over punt returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Riley's fourth season at USC and second in the Big Ten is critical for a program that hasn't tasted the College Football Playoff. Riley likes the development of both lines and Maiava's potential with potentially elite wideouts in Lemon and Lane. After going 1-4 on the road in 2024, USC faces difficult trips to Oregon, Notre Dame, Illinois and Nebraska. The Trojans also must fare better in close games.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Sept. 1	vs. LSU #	W	27-20
Sept. 7	Utah State	W	48-0
Sept. 21	at Michigan	L	24-27
Sept. 28	Wisconsin	W	38-21
Oct. 5	at Minnesota	L	17-24
Oct. 12	Penn State (ot)	L	30-33
Oct. 19	at Maryland	L	28-29
Oct. 25	Rutgers	W	42-20
Nov. 2	at Washington	L	21-26
Nov. 16	Nebraska	W	28-20
Nov. 23	at UCLA	W	19-13
Nov. 30	Notre Dame	L	35-49
Dec. 27	vs. Texas A&M %	W	35-31

#Las Vegas %Las Vegas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Missouri State
Sept. 6	Georgia Southern
Sept. 13	at Purdue
Sept. 20	Michigan State
Sept. 27	at Illinois
Oct. 11	Michigan
Oct. 18	at Notre Dame
Nov. 1	at Nebraska
Nov. 8	Northwestern
Nov. 15	Iowa
Nov. 22	at Oregon
Nov. 29	UCLA

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Husan Longstreet, QB	★★★★★
2.	Jahkeem Stewart, DL	★★★★
3.	Matai Tagoa'i, LB	★★★★
4.	AJ Tuitele, LB	★★★★
5.	Trestin Castro, CB	★★★★
6.	Aaron Dunn, OT	★★★★
7.	Harry Dalton III, RB	★★★★
8.	Romero Ison, WR	★★★★
9.	Alex Payne, OT	★★★★
10.	Alex Graham, CB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lincoln Riley • Record at School: 26-14 (3 years)
Career Record: 81-24 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Luke Huard
Defensive Coordinator: D'Anton Lynn • Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Stadium: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (77,500)

WASHINGTON HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 38 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE With budding star Demond Williams Jr. at the helm, head coach Jedd Fisch is expecting the Washington Huskies' offense to take a big step forward. The former 4-star recruit completed 81% of his passes for 374 yards and four touchdowns in just his second career start, a 35-34 loss to the Louisville Cardinals in the Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl.

The dual-threat quarterback is flanked by senior Jonah Coleman, who is expected to be one of the nation's best running backs in 2025. Fisch has loads of faith in sophomore Adam Mohammed and redshirt freshman Jordan Washington to relieve Coleman, giving the Huskies a deep rotation.

Wide receiver Denzel Boston proved to be one of the best pass-catchers in the Big Ten in 2024 (63 rec., 934 yds., nine touchdowns). Boston is expected to take another step forward, and Freshman All-America tight end Decker DeGraaf and Penn State transfer wideout Omari Evans, who brings field-stretching speed, are also on hand.

After the line allowed a Big Ten-worst 39 sacks in 2024, Fisch brought in Kansas State transfer Carver Willis to steady the group, which is expected to get big contributions from sophomore center Landen Hatchett and redshirt freshman Paki Finau, both former 4-star recruits.

DEFENSE New coordinator Ryan Walters snagged the services of arguably the best defensive player in the transfer portal in cornerback Tacario Davis, who rejoins Fisch after spending two seasons with him at Arizona. The 6-foot-4 cornerback is a smothering presence in man coverage.

The Huskies also beefed up the front seven in the portal. Linebackers Xe'ree Alexander and Taariq "Buddah" Al-Uqdah, who came to Seattle from UCF and Washington State, respectively, are expected to bring a physical presence to the middle of the defense. Al-Uqdah accounted for seven turnovers in 2024 — three interceptions and four fumble recoveries.

Up front, Western Michigan transfer Anterio Thompson and Utah transfer Simote Pepa bring depth and physicality, while Arizona transfer Ta'ita'i Uiagalelei provides versatility and a pass-rushing presence.

SPECIALISTS Transfer long-snapper Ryan Kean, an FCS Freshman All-American at Utah Tech, could be a stabilizing force in front of senior Grady Gross, who converted on just 69.2% of his field-goal attempts last season. The Huskies may be scrambling at punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS These Huskies look bigger, deeper and more prepared for the rigors of the Big Ten than last year's squad. It also helps that most of their tougher games will be played at Husky Stadium, where Washington is riding a 20-game winning streak. If Fisch's team finishes 9-3, it won't come as a surprise.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Weber State	W	35-3
Sept. 7	Eastern Michigan	W	30-9
Sept. 14	at Washington State	L	19-24
Sept. 21	Northwestern	W	24-5
Sept. 27	at Rutgers	L	18-21
Oct. 5	Michigan	W	27-17
Oct. 12	at Iowa	L	16-40
Oct. 26	at Indiana	L	17-31
Nov. 2	USC	W	26-21
Nov. 9	at Penn State	L	6-35
Nov. 15	UCLA	W	31-19
Nov. 30	at Oregon	L	21-49
Dec. 31	vs. Louisville #	L	34-35

#Sun Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Colorado State
Sept. 6	UC Davis
Sept. 20	at Washington St.
Sept. 27	Ohio State
Oct. 4	at Maryland
Oct. 11	Rutgers
Oct. 18	at Michigan
Oct. 25	Illinois
Nov. 8	at Wisconsin
Nov. 15	Purdue
Nov. 22	at UCLA
Nov. 29	Oregon

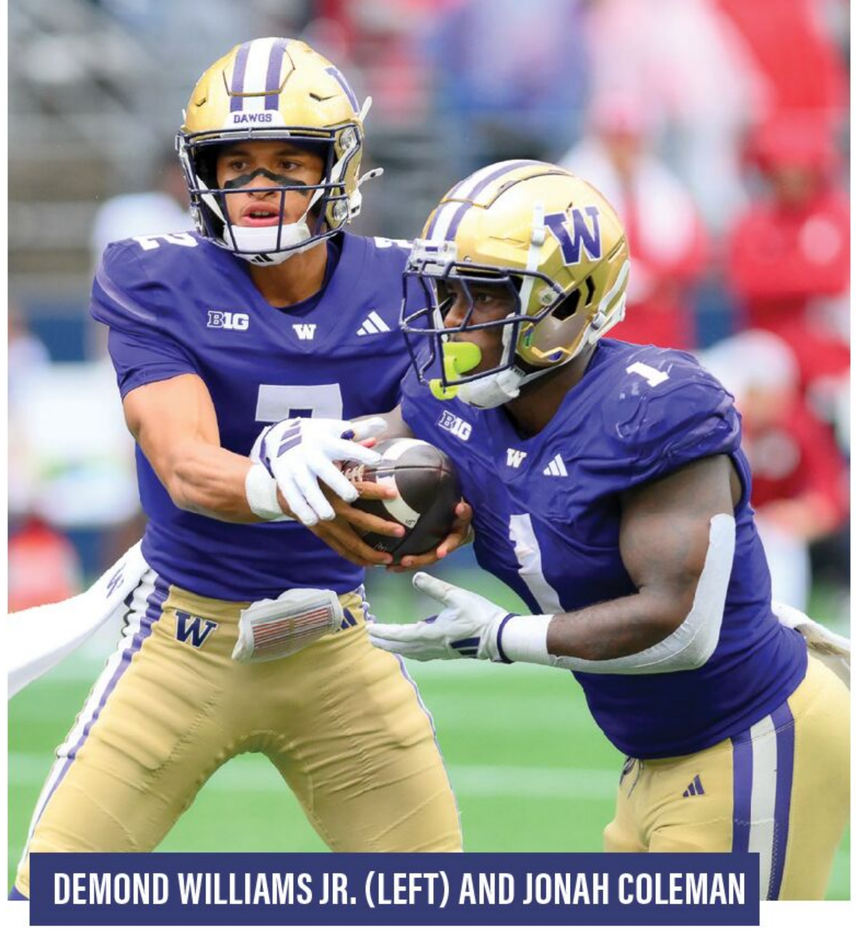
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Zaydrius Rainey-Sale, LB ★★★★
2. Dylan Robinson, CB ★★★★
3. Rylon Dillard-Allen, S ★★★★
4. Champ Taulealea, IOL ★★★★
5. Raiden Vines-Bright, WR ★★★
6. John Mills, IOL ★★★
7. Jack Shaffer, OT ★★★
8. Jonathan Epperson Jr., LB ★★★
9. Dash Beierly, QB ★★★
10. Treston McMillan, QB ★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jedd Fisch • Record at School: 6-7 (1 year)
Career Record: 23-29 (4+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jimmie Dougherty
Defensive Coordinator: Ryan Walters • Location: Seattle, Wash.
Stadium: Husky Stadium (70,083)



DEMOND WILLIAMS JR. (LEFT) AND JONAH COLEMAN

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"If the quarterback continues to develop, I think they're a most-improved candidate this year. Their biggest problem was the offensive line; that situation is how a coaching change and heavy portal can break bad on you. That group was truly bad last year. The quarterback seems to be a rising star even without a ton of reps, and they have legit weapons at wide receiver. ... Keep an eye on them in high school recruiting. They're starting to notch some big wins and go head-to-head with Oregon. I think they're a little bit ahead of the build that [Jedd] Fisch had at Arizona because the floor was a little higher at UW, even with the portal losses after Kalen [DeBoer]. ... They're not a contender yet, but they're going to be better across the board this year."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	12	**DENZEL BOSTON (JR.)**	16	Justice Williams (Fr.)
WR	0	Kevin Green Jr. (Jr.)	8	Chris Lawson (Fr.)
WR	5	Omari Evans (Sr.)	3	Rashid Williams (So.)
LT	50	Carver Willis (Sr.)	77	Maximus McCree (Sr.)
LG	53	Paki Finau (Fr.)	73	Champ Taulealea (Fr.)
C	66	Landen Hatchett (So.)	56	Geirean Hatchett (Sr.)
RG	58	Zachary Henning (So.)	73	Champ Taulealea (Fr.)
RT	74	**DREW AZZOPARDI (JR.)**	68	Soane Faasolo (So.)
TE	88	Quentin Moore (Sr.)	86	Decker DeGraaf (So.)
QB	2	Demond Williams Jr. (So.)	15	Kai Horton (Sr.)
RB	1	**JONAH COLEMAN (SR.)**	24	Adam Mohammed (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

OLB	5	Zach Durfee (Sr.)	91	Isaiah Ward (Jr.)
DT	77	Simote Pepa (Sr.)	97	Logan Sagapolu (Sr.)
DT	54	Anterio Thompson (Sr.)	90	Elinneus Davis (So.)
OLB	11	Ta'ita'i Uiagalelei (Sr.)	99	Russell Davis II (Jr.)
ILB	10	Xe'ree Alexander (Jr.)	17	Deven Bryant (So.)
ILB	3	Taariq Al-Uqdah (Jr.)	9	Jacob Manu (Sr.)
CB	8	Tacario Davis (Sr.)		Dylan Robinson (Fr.)
CB	7	**EPHESIANS PRYSOCK (SR.)**	0	Leroy Bryant (So.)
HUSKY	20	Rahshawn Clark (Fr.)	21	Dyson McCutcheon (Sr.)
S	24	Makell Esteen (Sr.)	12	Alex McLaughlin (Jr.)
S	4	CJ Christian (Sr.)	15	Rahim Wright II (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Grady Gross (Sr.)	KR	4 Jordan Washington (Fr.)
P	96	Troy Petz (So.)	PR	4 Jordan Washington (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

STEVEN BISIG-IMAGN IMAGES

VINNY ANTHONY II

KIRBY LEE-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BADGERS

"Nothing about the offense made sense here. [Phil] Longo moving on benefits everyone involved, and if they bounce back and become more of a modern version of that classic Wisconsin power run offense, you'll wonder why they ever made the move in the first place. ... [Jeff] Grimes is a great hire, and they flipped the entire offense except for the backs. They need to go back to Wisconsin football this season, and they've got a young backfield that can do it. ... They're talented in some spots, but they're still very young. [Luke] Fickell is the guy, but the offensive issues have overshadowed the overall plan so much that it's easy to see why some folks might lose faith. I think they just overreached on trying to modernize the program schematically."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	8	**VINNY ANTHONY II (SR.)**	13	Eugene Hilton Jr. (Fr.)
WR	4	Jayden Ballard (Sr.)	84	Chris Brooks Jr. (Jr.)
WR	2	Trech Kekahuna (So.)	14	Tyrell Henry (Sr.)
LT	56	**JOE BRUNNER (JR.)**	66	Leyton Nelson (Jr.)
LG		Davis Heinzen (Sr.)	78	Colin Cubberly (Fr.)
C	57	**JAKE RENFRO (FR.)**	73	Kerry Kodanko (Sr.)
RG	75	Emerson Mandell (Fr.)	67	JP Benzschawel (Sr.)
RT	71	**RILEY MAHLMAN (SR.)**	60	Nolan Davenport (Fr.)
TE	11	Tucker Ashcraft (Jr.)		Lance Mason (Sr.)
QB	9	Billy Edwards Jr. (Sr.)	18	Danny O'Neil (So.)
RB	7	Dilin Jones (Fr.)	6	Darrion Dupree (So.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	30	Charles Perkins (Jr.)	31	Jay'Viar Suggs (Sr.)
DT	68	**BEN BARTEN (SR.)**	76	Dillan Johnson (So.)
OLB	17	**DARRYL PETERSON (SR.)**	15	Sebastian Cheeks (Jr.)
ILB	0	Christian Alliegro (Jr.)		Mason Posa (Fr.)
ILB	4	Tackett Curtis (Jr.)	28	Antarron Turner (Jr.)
OLB	92	Corey Walker (Sr.)	51	Micheal Garner (Jr.)
CB	2	**RICARDO HALLMAN (SR.)**	11	Omilio Agard (Fr.)
CB	3	**NYZIER FOURQUREAN (SR.)**	5	D'Yoni Hill (Sr.)
NB	21	Geimere Latimer II (Jr.)	9	Austin Brown (Sr.)
S	9	**AUSTIN BROWN (SR.)**	13	Matthew Traynor (So.)
S	14	**PRESTON ZACHMAN (SR.)**	29	Matt Jung (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	90	Nathanial Vakos (Sr.)	KR	8 Vinny Anthony II (Sr.)
P	49	Atticus Bertrams (Jr.)	PR	14 Tyrell Henry (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WISCONSIN BADGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 44 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Head coach Luke Fickell shifted Wisconsin back to its typical style by hiring offensive coordinator Jeff Grimes this winter. Grimes' scheme, heavily reliant on wide zone runs and play-action passes, is similar to what the Badgers had done successfully for decades. Quarterback Billy Edwards Jr. was brought in to jumpstart the change in scheme after starting for a season at Maryland. Edwards will have a pair of talented running backs to work with in Dilin Jones and Darrion Dupree, and the Badgers landed transfer pass-catcher Jayden Ballard (Ohio State) to aid the transition.

Wisconsin should be able to produce a more consistent offense under Grimes, whose Kansas offense tied for 11th in the nation at 6.58 yards per play a year ago, but the schedule will test the depth of the running backs and offensive line. The line returns three starters and has been remarkably healthy for two consecutive seasons.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Mike Tressel has made significant changes to the Badgers defense after Wisconsin's worst showing vs. the run (165 yards allowed per game) since 2005. The Badgers got significantly bigger on the defensive line and at the outside linebacker position, with the goal of stopping the run. UT-Martin transfer Charles Perkins is a big upgrade, and the Badgers should be able to rotate their 1- and 3-techniques with a mix of experienced players and young talent.

Linebackers Christian Alliegro and Tackett Curtis will be asked to rack up tackles and improve the Badgers' paltry turnover production (12 takeaways in 2024). The secondary has four returning starters, including 2023 All-American Ricardo Hallman, but this group will miss safety Hunter Wohler, who led the team in tackles the past two seasons.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Nathanial Vakos and punter Atticus Bertrams both return. However, kickoff specialist Gavin Lahm is giving Vakos a run for his money. Receiver Vinny Anthony II proved he could be a weapon on kickoff returns, ranking 10th in FBS at 27.9 yards per return. Anthony also may provide an answer at punt returner, a spot Wisconsin wasted last year, ranking 15th in the Big Ten (6.1 yards per return).

FINAL ANALYSIS Schematic changes should help Wisconsin return to the rugged team it's been known to be, but a bear of a schedule could mask any improvements. A brutal stretch in October sees the Badgers play the past two College Football Playoff champions (Ohio State and Michigan), last season's Big Ten champ (Oregon) and rival Iowa. The program will get back on the right track from an identity standpoint, but a .500 record or better should be considered significant progress.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 30	Western Michigan	W	28-14
Sept. 7	South Dakota	W	27-13
Sept. 14	Alabama	L	10-42
Sept. 28	at USC	L	21-38
Oct. 5	Purdue	W	52-6
Oct. 12	at Rutgers	W	42-7
Oct. 19	at Northwestern	W	23-3
Oct. 26	Penn State	L	13-28
Nov. 2	at Iowa	L	10-42
Nov. 16	Oregon	L	13-16
Nov. 23	at Nebraska	L	25-44
Nov. 29	Minnesota	L	7-24

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 6	Middle Tennessee
Sept. 13	at Alabama
Sept. 20	Maryland
Oct. 4	at Michigan
Oct. 11	Iowa
Oct. 18	Ohio State
Oct. 25	at Oregon
Nov. 8	Washington
Nov. 15	at Indiana
Nov. 22	Illinois
Nov. 29	at Minnesota

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen Williams, DL	★★★★
2.	Mason Posa, LB	★★★★
3.	Nicolas Clayton, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Hardy Watts, IOL	★★★★
5.	Luke Emmerich, S	★★★★
6.	Logan Powell, IOL	★★★
7.	Grant Dean, S	★★★
8.	Torin Pettaway, DL	★★★
9.	Remington Moss, S	★★★
10.	Nolan Davenport, IOL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Luke Fickell • Record at School: 13-13 (2+ years) • Career Record: 76-38 (9+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Grimes • Defensive Coordinator: Mike Tressel • Location: Madison, Wis. • Stadium: Camp Randall Stadium (76,057)

C-USA CUSA PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	LIBERTY	FLAMES
2	WKU	HILLTOPPERS
3	JACKSONVILLE STATE	GAMECOCKS
4	UTEP	MINERS
5	DELAWARE	BLUE HENS
6	LOUISIANA TECH	BULLDOGS
7	SAM HOUSTON	BEARKATS
8	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	BLUE RAIDERS
9	FIU	PANTHERS
10	MISSOURI STATE	BEARS
11	NEW MEXICO STATE	AGGIES
12	KENNESAW STATE	OWLS

CUSA CHAMPIONSHIP

LIBERTY OVER WKU

ALL-CUSA TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	MAVERICK McIVOR	WKU
RB	VAUGHN BLUE	Liberty
RB	Jo'NATHAN SILVER	Delaware
AP	KAM THOMAS	UTEP
WR	KENNY ODOM	UTEP
WR	MATTHEW HENRY	WKU
WR	QUA'VEZ HUMPHREYS	Sam Houston
TE	ELI FINLEY	Louisiana Tech
C	AARON FENIMORE	Liberty
OL	MARSHALL JACKSON	WKU
OL	JAMES DAWN II	Sam Houston
OL	JAHEIM BUCHANON	FIU
OL	JACK TUCKER	Liberty

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	CJ BAZILE JR.	Liberty
DL	KD JOHNSON	UTEP
DL	JAWAUN CAMPBELL	Jacksonville State
DL	ANTHONY BYNUM	Middle Tennessee
LB	DONELIUS JOHNSON	Kennesaw State
LB	JOSEPH CARTER	Liberty
LB	KOLBE FIELDS	Louisiana Tech
LB	TYLER MARTINEZ	New Mexico State
CB	JERICO WASHINGTON	Kennesaw State
CB	BRIAN BLADES II	FIU
S	BRYLAN GREEN	Liberty
S	KT SEAY	Delaware

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	JOHN CANNON	WKU
P	COLE MAYNARD	WKU
KR	C'QUAN JNOPIERRE	FIU
PR	KAM THOMAS	UTEP

BOWL PROJECTIONS

New Orleans: WKU vs. Louisiana

Hawai'i: Liberty vs. Hawai'i

Bahamas: Jacksonville State vs. Miami (Ohio)

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

FIU
Offense: New: Nick Coleman
Old: David Yost

JACKSONVILLE STATE
Offense: New: Clint Trickett
Old: Rod Smith
Defense: New: Brian Williams
Old: Luke Olson

KENNESAW STATE
Offense: New: Mitch Militello
Old: Chris Klenakis
Defense: New: Marc Mattioli
Old: Greg Harris

LOUISIANA TECH
Offense: New: Tony Franklin
Old: Scott Parr, Nathan Young
Defense: New: Luke Olson
Old: Jeremiah Johnson, Jeff Burris

NEW MEXICO STATE
Offense: New: David Yost
Old: Andrew Mitchell (interim)

SAM HOUSTON
Offense: New: Zack Patterson
Old: Brad Cornelsen
Defense: New: Freddie Aughtry-Lindsay
Old: Skyler Cassity

UTEP
Offense: New: Mark Cala, Ryan Stanchek
Old: Jake Brown, Ryan Stanchek
Defense: New: Bobby Daly, Kevin Sigler
Old: J.J. Clark

WKU
Offense: New: Rick Bowie
Old: Will Friend
Defense: New: Da'Von Brown, Davis Merritt
Old: Tyson Summers

MAVERICK McIVOR, WKU
CAM COOK, JACKSONVILLE STATE

FROM LEFT: MICHAEL C. JOHNSON-USA TODAY SPORTS; ATHLON SPORTS

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	NEW SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Maverick McIvor	QB	WKU	Abilene Christian
	A prolific passer at the FCS level, McIvor is the Hilltoppers' next high-volume thrower.			
2.	Matthew Henry	WR	WKU	Western Illinois
	Henry, a fellow FCS product, figures to be McIvor's top target after a breakout year.			
3.	Cam Cook	RB	Jacksonville State	TCU
	After leading the Horned Frogs in rushing, Cook joins the reigning conference champs.			
4.	Ethan Vasko	QB	Liberty	Coastal Carolina
	The dual-threat returns to his home state after making 16 starts for the Chanticleers.			
5.	Gavin Wimsatt	QB	Jacksonville State	Kentucky
	Wimsatt brings FBS starting experience and mobility to a run-first offense.			
6.	Logan Fife	QB	New Mexico State	Montana
	After a one-year FCS stint, Fife hopes to spark the Aggies' passing offense.			
7.	Hahsaun Wilson	RB	UTEP	Charlotte
	Wilson, who paced the 49ers in rushing last season, should lead the Miners' backfield.			
8.	Gabe Peterson	DL	New Mexico State	Utah State
	Peterson's return to Las Cruces helps reinforce the Lobos' front seven.			
9.	Shomari Lawrence	RB	Missouri State	FIU
	Having spent time in CUSA, Lawrence can lead the Bears' backfield in their FBS debut.			
10.	Kadarius Calloway	RB	New Mexico State	Cal
	One of two Power 4 backs the Aggies added, Calloway brings playmaking ability.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. UTEP (74)
2. Liberty (83)
3. Middle Tennessee (98)
4. Louisiana Tech (100)
5. FIU (101)
6. WKU (102)
7. Jacksonville State (106)
8. New Mexico State (109)
9. Delaware (116)
10. Kennesaw State (129)
11. Sam Houston (132)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 23	Sam Houston at WKU
Sept. 6	Liberty at Jacksonville State
Sept. 20	James Madison at Liberty
Sept. 27	WKU at Missouri State
Oct. 3	Delaware at WKU
Oct. 8	Missouri State at Middle Tenn.
Oct. 15	UTEP at Sam Houston
Nov. 15	Middle Tennessee at WKU
Nov. 22	New Mexico State at UTEP
Nov. 22	Sam Houston at Middle Tenn.
Nov. 29	WKU at Jacksonville State
Nov. 29	Kennesaw State at Liberty

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jaylon Coleman	RB	Liberty	★★★★	381
2.	Ethan Houck	QB	Liberty	★★★	645
3.	Allen Gant	S	UTEP	★★★	870
4.	Kiandrea Barker	RB	Middle Tenn.	★★★	930
5.	DJ Hill-Smith	S	New Mexico St.	★★★	55*
6.	Kamron Cullins	DL	Liberty	★★★	1,038
7.	Nasir Newkirk	WR	Liberty	★★★	1,081
8.	Sterling Joseph	RB	FIU	★★★	1,102
9.	Jack Moran	QB	Jacksonville St.	★★★	1,141
10.	Jamal Frilot	EDGE	UTEP	★★★	1,144

*Rankings per On3 industry ranking; *Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

DELAWARE BLUE HENS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 113 | CUSA PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 9-2, 6-2 CAA (FCS)

OFFENSE Head coach Ryan Carty's spread offense benefits from experienced quarterbacks, several proven playmakers and a veteran front keyed by Fintan Brose and Anwar O'neal as the team transitions to the FBS.

Quarterbacks Nick Minicucci and Zach Marker have both started for the Blue Hens over the past two years but also missed games due to injuries. Naming a starter will be a key focus of preseason drills, but it also wouldn't be surprising to see both on the field.

Jake Thaw, a former Michigan transfer, had 41 receptions for 334 yards and five TDs, a couple on acrobatic catches, in earning FCS All-America honors. He's the most productive returnee in a promising pass-catching crew. Delaware has high hopes for Sean Wilson, whose one appearance last year led to two catches for two touchdowns.

In the backfield, All-American Marcus Yarns' departure provides opportunity for Jo'Nathan Silver and Saeed St. Fleur, who both had some big-play cameo moments last year, with Silver averaging 6.6 yards per carry.

DEFENSE Delaware typically plays a three-man front while employing three safeties, hoping that the unique look will confound opposing offenses.

Inside linebackers Dillon Trainer and Gavin Moul give the crew its nitty-gritty personality, along with hard-hitting safeties Jason Scott, KT Seay and Hasson Manning Jr. Seay's four interceptions last year also tied him for ninth nationally in the FCS.

While injuries have sometimes kept him out, nose guard Keyshawn Hunter relishes that position's difficult demands and has excelled. Defensive end Noah Matthews, a transfer from Kentucky, is among the newcomers who have a chance to make an impact.

SPECIALISTS Nate Reed set a school record with 47 touchbacks on kickoffs last year and should be a valuable weapon in that regard. He was 7-for-10 on field goals — with a long of 41 yards — and 35-for-39 on PATs, so the Blue Hens will hope for longer range and better accuracy. Returning punter Josh Cupitt could be sidelined by a knee injury, though Delaware has added a potential replacement in former Michigan Tech Division II All-American Brenden Lach.

FINAL ANALYSIS As a long-time FCS power with a winning tradition, large following and better funding than some of its Conference USA rivals, Delaware is well suited for the climb to the FBS. The Blue Hens will feel as though they can compete with most of their new league foes. They likely do have the talent and depth to do so, but it'll certainly be an adjustment. The weekly high-level challenges will be a learning experience and give Delaware a more precise perspective on exactly what it must do to rise to league contender status.

2024 RESULTS (9-2, 6-2) (FCS: CAA)

Aug. 29	Bryant	W	48-17
Sept. 14	at NC A&T	W	42-13
Sept. 21	Pennsylvania	W	29-22
Sept. 28	Sacred Heart	W	49-0
Oct. 5	at Monmouth	W	42-35
Oct. 12	Maine	W	44-21
Oct. 19	at Richmond	L	9-28
Oct. 26	UAlbany	W	28-14
Nov. 9	Rhode Island	W	24-21
Nov. 16	Campbell	W	41-22
Nov. 23	at Villanova	L	28-38

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Delaware State
Sept. 6	at Colorado
Sept. 13	UConn
Sept. 20	at FIU
Oct. 3	WKU
Oct. 15	at Jacksonville St.
Oct. 22	Middle Tennessee
Nov. 1	at Liberty
Nov. 8	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 15	at Sam Houston
Nov. 22	at Wake Forest
Nov. 29	UTEP

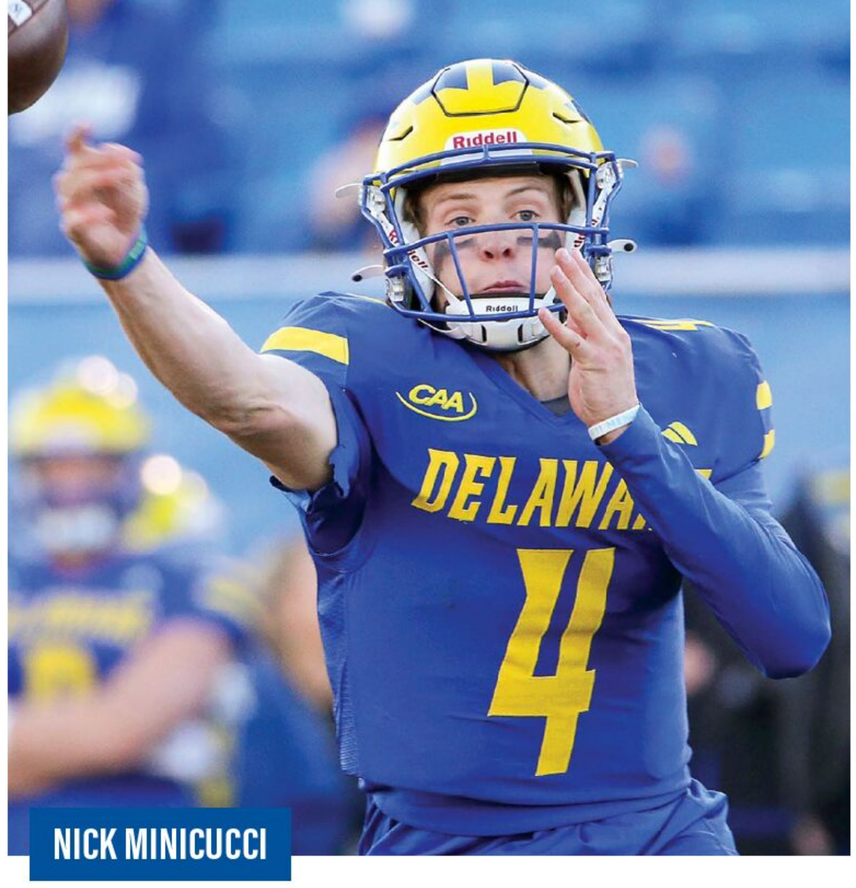
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Azir Lee, CB	★★★
2.	Yamdry Hernandez, EDGE	★★★
3.	AJ Graham, CB	★★★
4.	Julius Puryear, LB	★★★
5.	Emmanuel Doku, WR	★★★
6.	Keveun Mason, RB	★★★
7.	Brandon Gorham, EDGE	★★★
8.	Jamarion Kolagbodi, CB	★★★
9.	Noah Jefferson, S	★★★
10.	Jaxson Bowman, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Carty • Record at School: 26-11 (3 years) • Career Record: 26-11 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Terence Archer • Defensive Coordinator: Manny Rojas • Location: Newark, Del. • Stadium: Delaware Stadium (18,500)



NICK MINICUCCI

SCOUTING THE BLUE HENS

"They have a lot of positive momentum because they were a consistent FCS playoff team. The head coach is an alum, and they have a program identity. They run a lot of RPO stuff, and they're pretty balanced, and it's worked for them. But that's not a system that overcomes talent gaps. ... The key here is how well they can integrate the group they portaled in from other FBS schools to try to close the gap in talent. ... The long term is a lot harder to predict because they aren't in a talent-rich area like the other successful programs in this league, and they don't have Liberty's level of investment to buy coaches and players. ... They're probably a better program than some other schools in this league on Day 1, but the transition effect catches up with you quickly."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	0	Max Patterson (Sr.)	18	Sean Wilson (So.)
WR	8	Nicholas Laboy (Sr.)	**9**	**JA'CARREE KELLY (JR.)**
WR	15	Jake Thaw (Sr.)	87	Donovan Lewis (Jr.)
LT	**70**	**ANWAR O'NEAL (JR.)**	75	Noah Rosahac (So.)
LG	**54**	**FINTAN BROSE (SR.)**	74	Tyler Burnham (So.)
C	61	Steven Demboski (Sr.)	59	Patrick Methlie (Sr.)
RG	**71**	**PATRICK SHUPP (SR.)**	76	Jake O'Donoghue (So.)
RT	62	Anthony Caccese (Jr.)	77	Cole Snyder (Sr.)
TE	88	Elijah Sessoms (Sr.)	**12**	**CALEB FAURIA (SR.)**
QB	4	Nick Minicucci (Jr.)	3	Zach Marker (Sr.)
RB	27	Jo'Nathan Silver (Sr.)	28	Saeed St. Fleur (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	8	Ethan Saunders (Sr.)	13	Noah Matthews (Sr.)
NG	9	Keyshawn Hunter (Sr.)	52	Dominick Brogna (Sr.)
DT	**93**	**JACK HALL (SR.)**	11	James Yelbert Jr. (Sr.)
ILB	**19**	**DILLON TRAINER (SR.)**	32	Marje Mulumba (Sr.)
ILB	**35**	**GAVIN MOUL (JR.)**	58	Colin Gallagher (So.)
BAN	10	Blake Matthews (Sr.)	21	Anthony Crenshaw Jr. (Jr.)
CB	**4**	**A'KHOURY LYDE (SR.)**	29	Nyair Domnie (Jr.)
CB	1	Nate Evans (Sr.)	6	Kshawn Cox Jr. (Jr.)
S	**3**	**HASSON MANNING JR. (JR.)**	2	Mysonne Pollard (Sr.)
S	**14**	**KT SEAY (JR.)**	27	AJ Graham (Fr.)
S	**17**	**JASON SCOTT (SR.)**	30	Alex Nash-Lally (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Nate Reed (Sr.)	KR	2	Mysonne Pollard (Sr.)
P	39	Josh Cupitt (Sr.)	PR	15	Jake Thaw (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WILLIAM BRETZGER-DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL

KEYONE JENKINS

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"This might be the best chance for a HBCU head coach not named Deion to break through in the FBS. ... The play here is really simple: Willie [Simmons] knows Florida recruiting as well as anyone at any level of the sport. Can he get the players in? Can the school find NIL and keep the high school talent they develop? Simmons helps FIU change its rep in Florida high schools overnight, but it's more than just relationships. He was a great hire there because he can get more with less in the short term. He kept the QB they like from leaving, for example, and they've pulled in some former big-time Florida recruits as second-chancers. They can find more success than the previous staff did, but to sustain it and build a consistent conference contender, that's the bigger question here."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	4	Alex Perry (Jr.)	26	Eric Nelson (So.)
WR	83	Kyle McNeal (So.)	19	Ross Fournet (Sr.)
WR	21	Shaborne Demps (So.)	7	C'Quan Jnopierre (Sr.)
LT	78	Jaleel Davis (Jr.)	65	Akeem Neal (So.)
LG	**59**	**JAHEIM BUCHANON (SO.)**	67	Jon Rodriguez (So.)
C	52	Julius Pierce (Sr.)	54	Chad Staley (Jr.)
RG	72	Antonio Tripp Jr. (So.)	57	Knajee Saffold (So.)
RT	53	Daniel Michel (So.)	70	Mykeal Rabess (So.)
TE	0	Dallas Payne (Sr.)	87	Braiden Staten (So.)
QB	**1**	**KEYONE JENKINS (JR.)**	10	Clayton Dees (So.)
RB	5	Kejon Owens (Sr.)	34	Devonte Lyons (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	25	Kenton Simmons (Jr.)	5	Steven Shannon (Jr.)
DT	16	Olasunkonmi Agunloye (Jr.)		Aaron Armitage (Sr.)
DT	95	Quaylen Hill (Sr.)	99	Germaine Carter (So.)
DE	44	Keegan Davis (Sr.)	13	Dante Anderson (Jr.)
MLB	0	Johnny Chaney Jr. (Sr.)	35	Josiah Taylor (So.)
WLB	11	Percy Courtney Jr. (Jr.)	18	Dwight Nunoo (Sr.)
CB	**2**	**BRIAN BLADES II (SR.)**	7	Jai-Ayviauynn Celestine (Jr.)
CB	26	Victor Evans III (So.)	24	Ashton Levells (Sr.)
NB	27	Mister Clark (So.)	32	Bobby Salla Jr. (Sr.)
S	12	Websley Etienne (Jr.)	3	Demetrius Hill (Jr.)
S	22	Shamir Sterlin (So.)	9	Antonio Patterson (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Alejandro Prado (Sr.)	KR	7 C'Quan Jnopierre (Sr.)
P	6	Trey Wilhoit (Sr.)	PR	21 Shaborne Demps (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NELSON CHENAULT-USA TODAY SPORTS

FIU PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 129 | CUSA PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 CUSA

OFFENSE New FIU head coach Willie Simmons received a big boost to his fortunes in December when quarterback Keyone Jenkins opted to stay in South Florida instead of testing the transfer waters. The Miami native has thrown for 4,971 yards and 33 touchdowns with 19 interceptions over his first two seasons with the Panthers. He can also be effective in the running game, scoring eight touchdowns on the ground over the past two years.

"He's a guy you can build a team around," Simmons says.

Running back Kejon Owens projects to be one of the offense's top playmakers. Owens, who is entering his fifth season, has fresh legs — he has not run the ball more than 92 times in a season — and has averaged 4.7 yards per carry over his career. He had 392 yards and five touchdowns on 92 carries last year, earning an 80.8 offensive grade from Pro Football Focus, which was the fourth-best number in Conference USA among backs with 50 or more carries in 2024.

The Panthers lost most of their pass-catching production from last year, including star wide receiver Eric Rivers, who transferred to Georgia Tech.

The offensive line, under the tutelage of former Miami (Fla.) assistant Edwin Pata, has a mix of returnees (guard Jaheim Buchanon, tackles Jaleel Davis and Daniel Michel) and new and younger players — like Hurricanes transfer Antonio Tripp Jr. — who will need to fill gaps.

DEFENSE The Panthers return one of the conference's top defenders in second-team All-CUSA defensive back Brian Blades II. Blades had a breakout 2024 season, making 29 tackles with six pass breakups and an interception. Blades' 83.2 coverage grade from PFF was second-best among CUSA corners with 100 or more coverage snaps.

The Panthers lost many of their top defenders from last season, so they will need new contributors this year. Dante Anderson, a prolific defensive lineman at South Florida's Homestead High, transferred from Florida State to FIU and could play a key role.

SPECIALISTS FIU will look for new playmakers on special teams after losing all-conference return man Dean Patterson to the transfer portal and all-conference punter Daton Montiel to graduation. Placekicker Alejandro Prado returns after making 5-of-7 field goals.

FINAL ANALYSIS FIU is in transition as Simmons, the former head coach at Florida A&M, takes over his first FBS program. Simmons helped build the Rattlers into one of the FCS' top programs, but FIU may be an even tougher job. The Panthers return key players including Blades, Jenkins and Owens, but attrition and portal losses may make it tough to compete this season in Conference USA.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 CUSA)

Aug. 31	at Indiana	L	7-31
Sept. 7	Central Michigan	W	52-14
Sept. 14	at Florida Atlantic	L	20-38
Sept. 21	Monmouth	L	42-45
Sept. 28	Louisiana Tech	W	17-10
Oct. 8	at Liberty (ot)	L	24-31
Oct. 16	at UTEP	L	21-30
Oct. 22	Sam Houston	L	7-10
Oct. 29	New Mexico State	W	34-13
Nov. 16	at Jacksonville State	L	31-34
Nov. 23	at Kennesaw State	L	26-27
Nov. 30	Middle Tennessee	W	35-24

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Bethune-Cookman
Sept. 6	at Penn State
Sept. 13	Florida Atlantic
Sept. 20	Delaware
Oct. 4	at UConn
Oct. 14	at WKU
Oct. 21	Kennesaw State
Oct. 29	at Missouri State
Nov. 8	at Middle Tenn.
Nov. 15	Liberty
Nov. 22	Jacksonville State
Nov. 29	at Sam Houston

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sterling Joseph, RB	★★★
2.	King Massey, EDGE	★★★
3.	Tyson Carter, WR	★★★
4.	Anthony Smith, DL	★★★
5.	Kenny Williams, WR	★★★
6.	Takaylen Muex, IOL	★★★
7.	Sean Burke, TE	★★★
8.	Matthew Pointer, EDGE	★★★
9.	Christian Barrett, CB	★★★
10.	Jessiah McGrew, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Simmons • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 66-24 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nick Coleman • Defensive Coordinator: Jovan Dewitt • Location: University Park, Fla. • Stadium: Pitbull Stadium (20,000)

JACKSONVILLE STATE GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 110 | CUSA PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 9-5, 7-1 CUSA

OFFENSE Under first-year head coach Charles Kelly, co-offensive coordinator at Auburn last season, Jacksonville State's offense features a new-look quarterback room that includes former Kentucky/Rutgers QB Gavin Wimsatt, Memphis transfer Cade Cunningham, returner Caden Creel and freshman Jack Moran. Wimsatt appears to be the front-runner.

The wide receiver corps boasts plenty of experience. Returning wideouts include Michael Pettway (454 yards, three touchdowns last season), Brock Rechsteiner (241, two) and Jordan McCants (146 yards), all of whom played in every game last year and ranked second, third and seventh on the team in receiving yards, respectively. Rutgers transfer Deondre Johnson — a 6-foot-8 threat — will also join the group.

Pearson Baldwin, entering his fifth season in Jacksonville, will be a leader in a refurbished tight end room along with FCS Valdosta State transfer Harrison Hamsley.

The offensive line also boasts experience, with Will O'Steen, Daveion Harley and Amare "Bubba" Grayson. Running behind this O-line will be Andrew Paul, who backed up 1,638-yard rusher Tre Stewart last season, and TCU transfer Cam Cook, who led the Horned Frogs in 2024 with 460 yards and nine touchdowns.

DEFENSE The defensive line appears to be a team strength, as Jawaun Campbell and Darrell Prater will be joined by former Virginia Tech and Alabama defensive lineman Khurtiss Perry. Behind those three are other players who saw action as reserves last year.

The defensive backfield will be a question mark this season, with no returning starters. Auburn transfer Rod Elston, FCS Murray State transfer Larry Preston and Memphis transfer Tyrin Taylor were added this offseason and will look to bolster a defensive back group that also includes returning safeties Tee Denson and Patrick Taylor.

SPECIALISTS While starting punter Jack Dawson has departed, kicker Garrison Rippa and long-snapper Collin Westfelt return for the Gamecocks after starting every game last year. Rippa was named to last year's Conference USA All-Freshman team.

FINAL ANALYSIS There are plenty of wild cards with this year's Jacksonville State team, with the biggest being a head coach in his first season leading a program. However, Kelly brings plenty of optimism and excitement to a Gamecocks team that added a lot of talent via the transfer portal. Jax State should take its normal spot among the top teams in Conference USA yet again and will look to defend its league title.

2024 RESULTS (9-5, 7-1 CUSA)

Aug. 29	Coastal Carolina	L	27-55
Sept. 7	at Louisville	L	14-49
Sept. 14	at Eastern Michigan	L	34-37
Sept. 21	Southern Miss	W	44-7
Oct. 4	at Kennesaw State	W	63-24
Oct. 9	New Mexico State	W	54-13
Oct. 23	Middle Tennessee	W	42-20
Oct. 30	at Liberty	W	31-21
Nov. 9	at Louisiana Tech (ot)	W	44-37
Nov. 16	FIU	W	34-31
Nov. 23	Sam Houston	W	21-11
Nov. 30	at WKU	L	17-19
Dec. 6	WKU #	W	52-12
Dec. 20	vs. Ohio %	L	27-30

#C-USA Championship %Cure Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at UCF
Sept. 6	Liberty
Sept. 13	at Georgia Southern
Sept. 20	Murray State
Sept. 27	at Southern Miss
Oct. 9	at Sam Houston
Oct. 15	Delaware
Oct. 29	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 8	at UTEP
Nov. 15	Kennesaw State
Nov. 22	at FIU
Nov. 29	WKU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Quay Hood, DL	★★★
2.	Jack Moran, QB	★★★
3.	Blake Wallace, WR	★★★
4.	JQ Brooks, S	★★★
5.	Lance Johnson, IOL	★★★
6.	Luke Reyolds, S	★★★
7.	McCade Wright, EDGE	★★★
8.	Manny Watkins, S	★★★
9.	Ian Mitchell, EDGE	★★★
10.	Lucas Farrington, RB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charles Kelly • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Clint Trickett
Defensive Coordinator: Brian Williams • Location: Jacksonville, Ala.
Stadium: AmFirst Stadium (22,500)

MICHAEL PETTWAY

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"They could be first to worst, or close. That's just how roster turnover works these days. Rich Rod [Rich Rodriguez] took a couple really key players with him to West Virginia, and they're running a different system. Programs at this level hurt the most when a successful coach leaves. ... You look at [Charles] Kelly, and it's obvious they want to really focus on in-state for high school recruiting and try to pull Alabama guys back home in the portal. ... The staff make-up is really strong; these are guys who know the South, know this level of college football and adapt really well to the talent they're handed. There's going to be a transition period and a lot of new faces, but keeping [OC] Clint Trickett is a big move for them. Rich Rod helped put them on the map in FBS ball, and now I think they want to aim for something steadier long term."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	2	**MICHAEL PETTWAY (SR.)**	88	**JORDAN MCCANTS (JR.)**
WR		Deondre Johnson (So.)	80	Wyatt Sonderman (So.)
WR	89	Brock Rechsteiner (Sr.)	87	Aghogho Eyafe (Sr.)
LT	73	Will O'Steen (Sr.)	75	KD Small (Sr.)
LG		Adrian Gumm (Jr.)	77	Reggie Jackson (Jr.)
C	55	**DAVEION HARLEY (JR.)**	62	Cole Roberson (Fr.)
RG	60	Cameron Griffin (Jr.)	64	Jamal Siler (So.)
RT	54	**AMARE "BUBBA" GRAYSON (SO.)**	63	Ryland Bragg (So.)
TE	19	Pearson Baldwin (Sr.)		Harrison Hamsley (Sr.)
QB		Gavin Wimsatt (Sr.)		Cade Cunningham (Sr.)
RB		Cam Cook (Jr.)	0	Andrew Paul (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

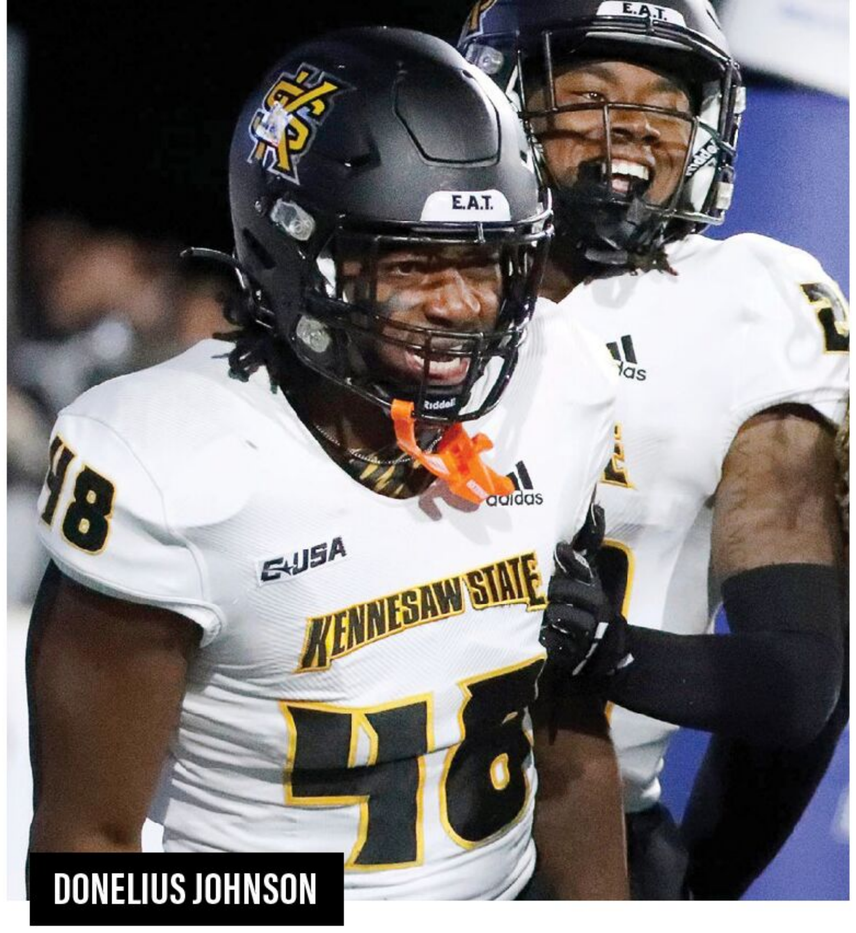
DE	93	**JAWAUN CAMPBELL (SO.)**	91	Gharin Stansbury (Sr.)
DT		Khurtiss Perry (Jr.)	92	**TALAN CARTER (SO.)**
DT	96	Darrell Prater (Jr.)	42	Shane Payton Hodges (Fr.)
OLB		Jacob Cruz (So.)		Myles Butler (Jr.)
ILB	19	Morven Joseph (Sr.)	34	Dajwon DeLoach (Jr.)
ILB	49	Thaxton Gallagher (Sr.)	40	Walker O'Steen (Fr.)
CB		Tyrin Taylor (Sr.)	46	Nick Covington (Jr.)
CB		Larry Preston (Sr.)	24	Jayke Jones (So.)
HUSKY	9	Patrick Taylor (Sr.)	28	Kyler McGrinn (So.)
S		Rod Elston (Jr.)		Tyler Bride (Sr.)
S	7	Tee Denson (Sr.)	12	Malcolm Jones (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Garrison Rippa (So.)	KR	2 Michael Pettway (Sr.)
P	29	Cade Backe (Sr.)	PR	2 Michael Pettway (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DAVE HYATT / SPECIAL TO THE GADSDEN TIMES



DONELIUS JOHNSON

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"The school doesn't operate the program like an actual FBS football team, at least from a finances and resources standpoint. Brian [Bohannon] did everything he could, but you knew he was gonna be the fall guy for the transition up. Problem is, I don't think they're doing anything different with the new staff. ... The offense will be totally different, easier to recruit to, but they don't have the roster to run it right now. They need to work the portal really hard to make that work. ... [Jerry] Mack is a big player's coach, and he's been at every level, but the school and the donors and NIL have to kick in and really get behind them. I think there's a mindset at KSU that just because they're close to Atlanta they'll land great players, but that's not how it works."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	1	Gabriel Benyard (Sr.)		Jordan Jackson (Sr.)
WR	6	Christian Moss (Sr.)	82	Navelle Dean (So.)
WR	**8**	**TYKEEM WALLACE (SR.)**	9	Davis Bryson (Jr.)
LT	77	Rene Miller (Jr.)	76	Nikola Milovac (So.)
LG	**65**	**JT PENNINGTON (SR.)**	71	ZaMario Woodgett (Fr)
C		Brandon Best (Jr.)		Jamiel Williams (Fr.)
RG	**55**	**SEABURN HINES (SO.)**	75	Josiah Chenault (So.)
RT	57	JaDarious Lee (Jr.)		Casey Jean-Baptiste (So.)
TE		Gerard Bullock Jr. (Sr.)	86	Ian Pederson (So.)
QB	5	Dexter Williams II (Sr.)	2	Amari Odom (So.)
RB	0	Coleman Bennett (Sr.)	3	Alexander Diggs (Jr.)
DEFENSE (7)				
DE		Ebenezer Dibula (Sr.)	97	Adam Watkins (Sr.)
NT	8	Roderick Daniels (Sr.)	58	Mike Jones (Sr.)
DT	6	Marcus Patterson (Jr.)	19	Elijah Harper (Jr.)
DE	**50**	**TYLON DUNLAP (SR.)**	96	Donovan Westmoreland (So.)
MLB	**48**	**DONELIUS JOHNSON (JR.)**	38	Jaiden Kimble (So.)
WLB	**1**	**GARLAND BENYARD (SR.)**	41	Amir Scarver (So.)
LB	44	Baron Hopson (Sr.)	55	Nehemiah Pgouda (So.)
CB	**20**	**TYLER HALLUM (SR.)**	4	Alexander Ford (Jr.)
CB	**21**	**JERICO WASHINGTON JR. (SO.)**	2	Caleb Offord (Sr.)
ROV	**29**	**MILON JONES (SR.)**		Antonio Stevens (Sr.)
FS	**23**	**ISAAC PAUL (SO.)**	10	Ethan Tookes (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	96	Britton Williams (Sr.)	**KR** 1	Gabriel Benyard (Sr.)
P	89	Joshua Huiet (Sr.)	**PR** 1	Gabriel Benyard (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KENNESAW STATE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 133 | CUSA PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 2-10, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE Dexter Williams II, a transfer from Georgia Southern via Indiana, emerged from a spirited spring competition to win the starting quarterback job. Williams brings dual-threat ability as the team transitions from the "ground and pound" style to a more balanced attack under new head coach Jerry Mack.

Running back Coleman Bennett spent last season at Rice after three years at FCS Bucknell, where he was All-Patriot League. Wide receiver Gabriel Benyard is healthy after being limited to seven games in 2024 and emerged as the top target during the spring. Former quarterback Gerard Bullock Jr., an FCS Tennessee State transfer, will start at tight end.

The offensive line remains a work in progress, but JT Pennington started 10 games at left guard, and Brandon Best, a transfer from nearby Georgia Tech, will likely start at center.

DEFENSE The secondary will be the strong point of the defense. JeRico Washington Jr. was a second-team All-Conference USA selection in 2024, and Tyler Hallum was an honorable mention pick. Washington led the team with two interceptions and three forced fumbles and was second with 43 solo tackles. Hallum started 10 games and led the team with 46 solo tackles; he also had a key interception in the upset win over Liberty.

The leader of the defense is inside linebacker Donelius Johnson, who led the team with 89 total tackles — including 10 against bowl team Sam Houston — and added nine tackles for a loss and 3.5 sacks.

The defensive line has experience with Tylon Dunlap, who started 12 games last year, and graduate transfer Ebenezer Dibula, a starter at FCS Bethune-Cookman. Donovan Westmoreland, a talented edge rusher, is expected to be at full strength after a non-football Achilles injury.

SPECIALISTS Britton Williams moves into the placekicking role after primarily handling kickoffs last season. Punter Joshua Huiet, who started two seasons ago and averaged 42.9 yards per punt, is back in the starting lineup as a senior, unless he is overtaken by Australian Matthew Choules. Benyard is expected to handle punt and kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS This will be another building year for the Owls, who went 2-10 in their first full season at the FBS level. Kennesaw fired Brian Bohannon, the man who built the program from scratch and in 11 seasons led them to FCS success. Mack was the running backs coach with the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars after three years as an assistant at Tennessee. Before that, Mack was head coach at FCS North Carolina Central from 2014-17 and won three MEAC championships. The Owls brought in 33 new players this spring and were expected to add more before fall camp.

2024 RESULTS (2-10, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 31	at UTSA	L	16-28
Sept. 7	Louisiana	L	10-34
Sept. 14	at San José State	L	10-31
Sept. 28	Tennessee-Martin	L	13-24
Oct. 4	Jacksonville State	L	24-63
Oct. 15	at Middle Tennessee	L	5-14
Oct. 23	Liberty	W	27-24
Oct. 30	at WKU	L	14-31
Nov. 9	at UTEP	L	35-43
Nov. 16	Sam Houston (ot)	L	17-23
Nov. 23	FIU	W	27-26
Nov. 30	at Louisiana Tech	L	0-33

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Wake Forest
Sept. 6	at Indiana
Sept. 13	Merrimack
Sept. 20	Arkansas State
Sept. 27	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 9	Louisiana Tech
Oct. 21	at FIU
Oct. 28	UTEP
Nov. 8	at New Mexico St.
Nov. 15	at Jacksonville St.
Nov. 22	Missouri State
Nov. 29	at Liberty

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tay'vion Lawson, CB	★★★
2.	ZaMario Woodgett, IOL	★★★
3.	Clayton Coppock, WR	★★★
4.	Kayden Miller, S	★★★
5.	Jamari Harrold, TE	★★★
6.	Jeremiah Solomon, CB	★★★
7.	Skyler Williams, QB	★★★
8.	Jayce Cora, WR	★★★
9.	Byron Jackson, LB	★★★
10.	Haston Crawford, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jerry Mack • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 31-15 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mitch Militello • Defensive Coordinator: Marc Mattioli • Location: Kennesaw, Ga. • Stadium: Fifth Third Stadium (10,200)

HELEN COMER/THE DAILY NEWS JOURNAL

LIBERTY FLAMES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 67 | CUSA PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 8-4, 5-3 CUSA

OFFENSE In head coach Jamey Chadwell's third year at Liberty, the offense will look much different from his first two seasons. Most notably, quarterback Kaidon Salter and running back Quinton Cooley are no longer on the team, as the former has transferred to Colorado and the latter is pursuing NFL dreams. Chadwell turned to the transfer portal and brought in former Coastal Carolina quarterback Ethan Vasko, who is expected to lead the Flames' offense in 2025. Vasko started all 12 games for the Chanticleers in 2024, throwing for 2,110 yards with 14 touchdowns, eight interceptions and a 54.6% completion rate.

After leading the nation in rushing in 2023, Cooley helped carry the Flames to 250.7 yards rushing per game in '24, fourth-best in the country. This year's running back room is inexperienced but doesn't lack talent, highlighted by Caden Williams, Julian Gray, Vaughn Blue and Georgia Tech transfer Evan Dickens. If the backfield can get close to the level of production the team saw in Chadwell's first two seasons, this offense should be good enough to have the Flames in the CUSA championship hunt again.

DEFENSE The Flames return five starters from a 2024 unit that ranked third in CUSA in both scoring defense (23.5 ppg) and total defense (350.4 ypg).

There is experience returning to the defensive front, including second-team All-CUSA performer TJ Bush Jr., who is entering his third season as a regular contributor. Joseph Carter brings loads of experience and leadership to the defensive unit from his spot at linebacker.

The question marks reside in the defensive backfield, where Liberty has been susceptible to big plays. A nation-leading 21 interceptions in 2023 covered up that weakness, but as that number dipped to eight last fall, the defense struggled at times to get stops in critical situations.

SPECIALISTS Brylan Green and Gray are back in the return game, where they have showcased their playmaking ability. Max Morgan returns after ranking fifth in net punting in CUSA last year (38.5 yards). Brayden Beck is currently the only placekicker on the team with any experience, having made 4-of-5 field-goal attempts in 2021 as a freshman.

FINAL ANALYSIS For a third straight season, Liberty will play one of the weakest schedules in the country and may be favored in every game this year. It worked out in 2023, with the Flames going 13-1 and winning the CUSA Championship, but last year, Liberty struggled to a fourth-place CUSA finish. The defense might have to carry the offense in the early part of the season until Vasko and Co. get all the kinks worked out. Once they do, the Flames should be right in the mix for a conference title once again.

TJ BUSH JR.

SCOUTING THE FLAMES

"It's fair to say they underperformed relative to their own standards last season because they're better resourced than any other program in this league. The Kennesaw loss was unexplainable. ... They're looking to stand out every single season like a Boise State, which means you have to dominate consistently inferior programs in conference play, and they weren't as consistent as we've previously seen from that staff. ... [Jamey] Chadwell might be there for the time being. It took him a long time to leave Coastal Carolina, and that was only for a better-paying G5 job. They need to revamp the offense and get back to their basics. Bringing in [quarterback Ethan] Vasko from Coastal is interesting, I think he's a better fit with Chadwell's system than what he did there."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	5	Elijah Canion (Sr.)	2	Casey Cain (Sr.)
WR	3	Jamari Person (Jr.)	8	Tyson Mobley (Sr.)
WR	6	Reese Smith (Sr.)	9	Donte Lee Jr. (Jr.)
LT	**75**	**JACK TUCKER (SR.)**	66	Erwil Anthony Jr. (Sr.)
LG	51	D.J. Geth (Fr.)	77	Andrew Johnson (Sr.)
C	**61**	**AARON FENIMORE (SO.)**	54	Cal Grubbs (Fr.)
RG	55	Harrison Hayes (Sr.)	78	Blake Heckmann (Fr.)
RT	56	Christian Williams (Jr.)	79	Trey Bedosky (Sr.)
TE	84	Jacob Jenkins (Sr.)	83	Austin Henderson (Sr.)
QB	15	Ethan Vasko (Jr.)	7	Michael Merdinger (Fr.)
RB	21	Caden Williams (Fr.)	1	Julian Gray (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	3	TJ Bush Jr. (Jr.)	1	Larry Jones III (Jr.)
DT	4	Jay Hardy (Sr.)	92	Chris Boti (Sr.)
DT	99	Bryce Dixon (Jr.)	97	Mike Jarvis (Sr.)
JOKER	**11**	**CJ BAZILE JR. (SR.)**	17	Bryson Jennings (Jr.)
MLB	0	Deontae Lawson (Jr.)	28	Justin Jefferson (Sr.)
WLB	**25**	**JOSEPH CARTER (SR.)**	6	Micah Pollard (Jr.)
CB	**20**	**DEXTER RICKS JR. (JR.)**	22	Jayden Sweeney (Jr.)
CB	26	Amarian Williams (Sr.)	28	Jamal Miles (So.)
S	**29**	**A'KHORI JONES (SR.)**	0	Jalon Rock (Sr.)
S	**15**	**BRYLAN GREEN (SR.)**	31	Christian Bodnar (So.)
S	2	Eldric Griffin (Sr.)	14	Elijah Auguste (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	85	Brayden Beck (Sr.)	KR	1 Julian Gray (Sr.)
P	37	Max Morgan (Jr.)	PR	15 Brylan Green (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (8-4, 5-3 CUSA)

Aug. 31	Campbell	W	41-24
Sept. 7	at New Mexico State	W	30-24
Sept. 14	UTEP	W	28-10
Sept. 21	East Carolina	W	35-24
Oct. 8	FIU (ot)	W	31-24
Oct. 23	at Kennesaw State	L	24-27
Oct. 30	Jacksonville State	L	21-31
Nov. 9	at Middle Tennessee	W	37-17
Nov. 16	at UMass (ot)	W	35-34
Nov. 23	WKU	W	38-21
Nov. 29	at Sam Houston	L	18-20
Jan. 4	vs. Buffalo #	L	7-26

#Bahamas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Maine
Sept. 6	at Jacksonville St.
Sept. 13	at Bowling Green
Sept. 20	James Madison
Sept. 27	at Old Dominion
Oct. 8	at UTEP
Oct. 14	New Mexico State
Nov. 1	Delaware
Nov. 8	Missouri State
Nov. 15	at FIU
Nov. 22	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 29	Kennesaw State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ethan Houck, QB	★★★★
2.	Jaylon Coleman, RB	★★★
3.	Kam Cullins, DL	★★★
4.	Nasir Newkirk, WR	★★★
5.	Bryce Randolph, ATH	★★★
6.	Sam Cohen, EDGE	★★★
7.	Gabe Smith, IOL	★★★
8.	Brandon Edozie, OT	★★★
9.	Gavin Askew, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jeffrey Hairston Jr., EDGE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jamey Chadwell • Record at School: 21-5 (2 years) • Career Record: 119-62 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Willy Korn, Newland Isaac • Defensive Coordinators: Kyle Krantz, Skylor Magee • Location: Lynchburg, Va.
Stadium: Williams Stadium (25,000)

MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

EVAN BULLOCK

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Probably the biggest shocker in our league was that they didn't let [head coach Sonny] Cumbie go. The program's been totally flat, and everything we've heard is that they weren't on the same page and that change was coming. ... They had a lot of one-score losses, too. ... Something has to change on offense, and Sonny needs to deliver more of what he did in the old Big 12 [as an assistant at Texas Tech and TCU]. Louisiana Tech isn't the Group of 5 upstart that it used to be, and it's a bigger financial lift to fire and hire a whole new staff, but [the current staff] is definitely gone this season if they can't get to a bowl. It's a better job than what he's done with it so far, even with that defense. They need a shot in the arm on offense to survive."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	47	Jay Wilkerson (Jr.)	14	Dakota Williams (Jr.)
WR	1	Devin Gandy (Sr.)	9	Marlion Jackson (Jr.)
WR	13	Shadeed Ahmed (Sr.)	3	Dedrick Latulas (Jr.)
LT	73	Kenneth Bannister (Sr.)	68	Tristan Santoro (So.)
LG	60	Roy Brackins III (So.)	78	Ashanti Cole (Sr.)
C	**55**	**LANDON NELSON (SR.)**	58	Jonathan Denis (Sr.)
RG	66	Ja'Marion Kennedy (So.)	77	Keystone Allison (So.)
RT	**72**	**HAYDEN CHRISTMAN (SO.)**	67	Brett Canis (Sr.)
TE	**84**	**ELI FINLEY (JR.)**	83	Kendrick Rucker (Jr.)
QB	**7**	**EVAN BULLOCK (SO.)**	5	Blake Baker (So.)
RB	**22**	**OMIRI WIGGINS (JR.)**	4	Clay Thevenin (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	94	Emmanuel Oguns (So.)	99	Judd Rouyea (So.)
NT	97	Christian Davis (So.)	96	Zion Nason (Sr.)
DE	98	Donovan Rieman (Jr.)	93	Jacob Bradford (So.)
LB	42	Sifa Leota (Sr.)	22	Jadon Mayfield (So.)
LB	**10**	**KOLBE FIELDS (SR.)**	24	Alonzo Jackson Jr. (So.)
LB	9	Mekhi Mason (Jr.)	25	Colton Deckard (So.)
CB	**11**	**CEDRIC WOODS (SR.)**	18	Noah Biglow (Sr.)
CB	7	Jhamal Shelby Jr. (Jr.)	36	Navarion Benson (Sr.)
S	**8**	**JACOB FIELDS (JR.)**	6	Jakari Foster (Sr.)
S	0	Blake Thompson (Jr.)	19	Benji Johnson (Jr.)
S	1	Michael Richard (Jr.)	4	Kam Franklin (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	43	Drew Henderson (So.)	KR	22	Omiri Wiggins (Jr.)
P	48	John Hoyet Chance (So.)	PR	3	Dedrick Latulas (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NELSON CHENAULT-IMAGN IMAGES

LOUISIANA TECH BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 114 | CUSA PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 5-8, 4-4 CUSA

OFFENSE Evan Bullock is back as QB1 after starting the last nine games of 2024 as a redshirt freshman. He took his lumps in the process. On the plus side, Bullock did post one of the best interception rates in the country, with only three picks in 300 attempts. Meanwhile, he also endured one of the nation's highest sack rates, going down 33 times, and he struggled to connect downfield, finishing just 8-of-29 on attempts of 20-plus air yards, per Pro Football Focus. Progress will be measured in big plays.

The more pressing question: Who's going to be on the receiving end? The most reliable playmaker in 2024, wide receiver Tru Edwards, capitalized on his Conference USA-best 84 receptions by bolting for Kentucky. The lion's share of his targets will likely go to whoever emerges from a pack of candidates to replace Edwards in the slot — always a productive spot in coordinator Tony Franklin's system — as well as tight end Eli Finley.

As for explosiveness, the first name out of head coach Sonny Cumbie's mouth in the spring was Devin Gandy, a grad transfer from FCS Sacramento State who made a quick impression in his first weeks on campus.

DEFENSE First priority for new defensive coordinator Luke Olson is rebuilding a depleted defensive line. At least one piece of that puzzle fell into place in the spring with the emergence of juco transfer Emmanuel Oguns at defensive end. The rest of the front remains a work in progress.

The back eight is on more solid footing, thanks to seven returning players who logged at least 250 snaps last year for a unit that led CUSA in total defense (308.4 ypg). The headliner, senior linebacker Kolbe Fields, was a hit in his first season in Ruston, earning a second-team all-conference nod after previous stops at South Carolina and LSU.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Drew Henderson passed his audition in the bowl game, connecting on his first two career field-goal attempts to account for the team's only points in a loss to Army. He and punter John Hoyet Chance were the only players on the roster at their respective positions in the spring. The Bulldogs are also replacing their primary return men on both kickoffs and punts, areas where they'd love to generate fireworks.

FINAL ANALYSIS The 2020s are shaping up as a lost decade for Tech, which has yet to exceed .500 after posting eight winning records in nine years from 2011-19. Last year's 5-8 finish was slightly less depressing — the Bulldogs even snuck into the Independence Bowl based on their Academic Progress Rate — but not nearly enough to spare Cumbie from the hot seat in Year 4. The offense was a flop, falling to 118th nationally in scoring. The pressure is on to put more points on the board and return to the black.

2024 RESULTS (5-8, 4-4 CUSA)

Aug. 31	Nicholls	W	25-17
Sept. 14	at NC State	L	20-30
Sept. 21	Tulsa (ot)	L	20-23
Sept. 28	at FIU	L	10-17
Oct. 10	Middle Tennessee	W	48-21
Oct. 15	at New Mexico St. (ot)	L	30-33
Oct. 22	UTEP	W	14-10
Oct. 29	at Sam Houston	L	3-9
Nov. 9	Jacksonville State (ot)	L	37-44
Nov. 16	at WKU	W	12-7
Nov. 23	at Arkansas	L	14-35
Nov. 30	Kennesaw State	W	33-0
Dec. 28	vs. Army #	L	6-27

#Independence Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	SE Louisiana
Sept. 6	at LSU
Sept. 13	New Mexico State
Sept. 20	Southern Miss
Sept. 27	at UTEP
Oct. 9	at Kennesaw State
Oct. 21	WKU
Oct. 28	Sam Houston
Nov. 8	at Delaware
Nov. 15	at Washington St.
Nov. 22	Liberty
Nov. 29	at Missouri State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Daejawn Smith, WR	★★★★
2.	Daylin Page, EDGE	★★★
3.	Kolby Thomas, WR	★★★
4.	Tobias Gary, S	★★★
5.	Zheric Hill, LB	★★★
6.	Luke Watkins, WR	★★★
7.	Jaylon Parnell, LB	★★★
8.	Jalen Mickens, WR	★★★
9.	Ervin Smith, IOL	★★★
10.	Johnnie Thiel IV, WR	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Cumbie • Record at School: 11-26 (3 years)
Career Record: 13-29 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tony Franklin
Defensive Coordinator: Luke Olson • Location: Ruston, La.
Stadium: Joe Aillet Stadium (28,562)

MIDDLE TENNESSEE BLUE RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 127 | CUSA PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE Quarterback Nicholas Vattiato is Middle Tennessee's best weapon after passing for 3,092 yards in back-to-back seasons. And he's an effective runner as well. But the Blue Raiders must replace their leading rusher and top two receivers on an offense that was already lacking. They failed to score more than 24 points in a single game against FBS competition last season and averaged only 89 rushing yards per game.

Jekail Middlebrook (273 rushing yards, two TDs in 2024) returns in the backfield. Myles Butler (30 rec., 366 yds., three TDs) is back at wide receiver. But all skill positions likely will feature a committee of contributors rather than singular stars.

The offensive line must improve, and that's plausible. Along with four part-time starters returning, FCS Rhode Island transfer Jacob Otts and Auburn transfer EJ Harris should provide better options up front.

DEFENSE Middle Tennessee ranked at or near the bottom of Conference USA in every major statistical category on defense last season. The Blue Raiders allowed 449.2 yards and 34.3 points per game. Don't expect head coach and defensive guru Derek Mason to accept those results in his second season. He's got a good foundation up front with the return of four starters. Damonte Smith, Shakai Woods, Anthony Bynum and edge rusher Brandon Buckner combined for 18 tackles for a loss last season.

Linebacker Parker Hughes is the team's top returning tackler. But transfer linebacker Alex Mitchell, who led FCS Chattanooga with 101 tackles, could be a key addition. The secondary is a sore spot after ranking among the nation's worst in pass efficiency defense. John Howse IV is a steady safety, but no starting positions are secure until the unit improves.

SPECIALISTS MTSU must replace three All-CUSA specialists. Punter Grant Chadwick transferred to LSU, punt returner Omari Kelly transferred to Michigan State and long-snapper Brody Butler graduated. New Mexico transfer Zach Benedict is the front-runner to be the placekicker, but it'll be an open competition. Oklahoma transfer Ashton Logan is the likely punter. Kick and punt coverage was a team strength last season, and that must continue to support the other developing phases.

FINAL ANALYSIS Mason's debut season yielded the Blue Raiders' worst record since 2011. They must replace all five All-CUSA performers. And they lost more than they gained in the transfer portal. Physicality is the path back to a competitive level.

It's plausible that MTSU could go 2-2 in non-conference play. So success or failure will depend on its progress in conference play, specifically in road games, where it struggled in 2024.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 31	Tennessee Tech	W	32-25
Sept. 7	at Ole Miss	L	3-52
Sept. 14	WKU	L	21-49
Sept. 21	Duke	L	17-45
Sept. 28	at Memphis	L	7-24
Oct. 10	at Louisiana Tech	L	21-48
Oct. 15	Kennesaw State	W	14-5
Oct. 23	at Jacksonville State	L	20-42
Nov. 2	at UTEP	W	20-13
Nov. 9	Liberty	L	17-37
Nov. 23	New Mexico State	L	21-36
Nov. 30	at FIU	L	24-35

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Austin Peay
Sept. 6	at Wisconsin
Sept. 13	at Nevada
Sept. 20	Marshall
Sept. 27	at Kennesaw State
Oct. 8	Missouri State
Oct. 22	at Delaware
Oct. 29	Jacksonville State
Nov. 8	FIU
Nov. 15	at WKU
Nov. 22	Sam Houston
Nov. 29	at New Mexico St.

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dominic Taylor, RB	★★★
2.	Archie Roseman V, DL	★★★
3.	Locke Kennedy, S	★★★
4.	Kiandrea Barker, RB	★★★
5.	Micah Smith, LB	★★★
6.	Christopher Noble, S	★★★
7.	Neo Clifton, WR	★★★
8.	Elijah Hunter Jr., CB	★★★
9.	Ben Hubbard, WR	★★★
10.	Otto Janse Van Rensburg, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Derek Mason • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 30-64 (7+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bodie Reeder • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Stewart • Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn. • Stadium: Floyd Stadium (27,303)

NICHOLAS VATTIATO

SCOUTING THE BLUE RAIDERS

"Their goal is getting back to a winning season. They're going to be more talented than they were last year, and the systems are in place for them to make a pretty big jump on both sides of the ball. ... [Derek] Mason's experience recruiting in that area is helping, and they have a long-term vision where they aren't wanting to flip one portal class and get out of there — at least we don't think so. ... [Quarterback Nicholas] Vattiato has a lot of potential for them, and they're starting to put some pieces around him. ... Under Mason, they should be able to make a pretty big step up on defense as well; it was obvious they were keeping things pretty vanilla on that side last year starting out. ... Mason is a great head coach, and they should be bowling this year."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	**MYLES BUTLER (SR.)**	6	AJ Jones (Jr.)
WR	17	Gamarion Carter (Sr.)	1	Nahzae Cox (Jr.)
WR	13	Cam'ron Lacy (So.)	4	Tyree Patterson (So.)
LT	73	**MARCUS MILLER (SR.)**	79	**ZACH CLAYTON (SO.)**
LG	56	EJ Harris (Jr.)	50	Ikani Tuiono (Sr.)
C	55	**MATEO GUEVARA (JR.)**	66	Aaren Alexander (Sr.)
RG	71	**ELLIS ADAMS (SR.)**	70	Isaac Rue (So.)
RT	72	Jacob Otts (Sr.)	77	Diego Blattler (Jr.)
TE	42	Evan Poticher (So.)	82	Hunter Tipton (Jr.)
QB	11	**NICHOLAS VATTIATO (SR.)**	16	Roman Gagliano (Fr.)
RB	9	Jekail Middlebrook (So.)	31	Austin Clemons (Fr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	0	**ANTHONY BYNUM (SO.)**	93	Aidan Butts (So.)
NT	92	**DAMONTE SMITH (SR.)**	96	James Gillespie (Sr.)
DT	98	**SHAKAI WOODS (SO.)**	99	Ja'Darious Morris (So.)
EDGE	11	**BRANDON BUCKNER (SR.)**	31	Mathias Malaki-Donaldson (Jr.)
MLB	9	**PARKER HUGHES (SR.)**	3	Alex Mitchell (Sr.)
WLB	46	Reggie Johnson (Jr.)	51	Amarrien Bailey (So.)
CB	10	Jordan Chestnut (Jr.)	15	Devan Carlisle (So.)
CB	21	Abdul Muhammad (Sr.)	2	De'Arre McDonald (Sr.)
NB	22	Juwon Gaston (Sr.)	27	Rickey Smith (Sr.)
S	12	**JOHN HOWSE IV (SR.)**	18	Kalen Woods (Jr.)
S	7	**BRENDON HARRIS (SR.)**	26	Jared Douglas (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Zach Benedict (Jr.)	KR	13	Cam'ron Lacy (So.)
P	32	Ashton Logan (Jr.)	PR	13	Cam'ron Lacy (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

PETRE THOMAS-IMAGN IMAGES

JACOB CLARK

NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

SCOUTING THE BEARS

"This is a good coaching staff with a strong program identity, and that's mandatory when you're trying to create a smooth transition up to FBS. There's plenty of case studies in this league that go both ways, and I think they could be successful in a few seasons. ... The quarterback is really solid, and assuming he's their guy for this first season in the league, he'll surprise some folks. He's seen top-end FCS defenses better than the bottom of this league. ... They've already added a few guys from other programs in the league, and they have a pretty solid defensive core. I expect they'll be aggressive portaling in guys with FBS experience to push their existing starters. It's a transition and they won't win much, but they're promising."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)					
WR	5	James BlackStrain (Sr.)	14	Isaiah McMorris (Fr.)
WR	**83**	**JMARIYAE ROBINSON (JR.)**	11	Sean Reese (Jr.)
WR	9	Ronnel Johnson (Jr.)	1	Dash Luke (Sr)
LT	76	Cristian Loaiza (Jr.)	51	Ebubedike Nnabugwu (So.)
LG	**72**	**MARK HUTCHINSON (SR.)**	77	Noah Gardner (So.)
C	**71**	**CASH HUDSON (JR.)**	75	Logan Scrivner (Fr.)
RG	**58**	**HUTSON LILLIBRIDGE (SR.)**	54	Matthew Greene (So.)
RT	**74**	**ERICK CADE (SR.)**	78	Brayden Thompson (Fr.)
TE	**87**	**GARY CLINTON (SR.)**		James Rexroat (Fr.)
QB	**12**	**JACOB CLARK (SR.)**	4	Cole Feuerbacher (So.)
RB	2	Shomari Lawrence (Sr.)	10	King Davis (Fr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	17	Davon Townley Jr. (Sr.)	30	Caden Wiest (So.)
DT	**57**	**GILLES TCHIO (JR.)**	99	Ryan Williams (Sr.)
DT	50	Mitchell Toney (So.)	90	Sterling Smithson (Sr.)
DE	7	DJ Wesolak (Jr.)	43	Caleb Dietlin (Sr.)
OLB	6	Jared Lloyd (Jr.)	31	Cooper Roy (So.)
MLB		Jalen Brooks (Sr.)	44	Kanye Young (Sr.)
OLB	21	Jashawn Cooper (So.)	32	Hieko Malone (Fr.)
CB	14	Thomas Anderson (Sr.)	8	Brandon Vines (Sr.)
CB	5	Navonn Barrett (So.)	25	Camron Williams (Fr.)
NB	9	Dylan Dixson (Jr.)	**10**	**DYLAN SIMMONS (SR.)**
S	**16**	**J.J. O'NEAL (SR.)**	3	Khalil Anderson (Sr.)
S	0	Maguire Neal (Sr.)	15	E.J. Williams (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	36	Yousef Obeid (So.)	KR	1	Dash Luke (Sr.)
P	25	Stewart McDonald (Fr.)	PR	1	Dash Luke (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MISSOURI STATE BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 131 | CUSA PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 8-4, 6-2 MVC (FCS)

OFFENSE Quarterback Jacob Clark returns to guide a Missouri State passing offense that ranked among the best in the FCS last season. The Walter Payton Award finalist broke nearly every single-season school passing record, finishing with 3,604 yards, 26 touchdowns and six interceptions. He'll have to adjust to different weapons around him, including an overhauled backfield and several new starters at wide receiver.

FIU transfer RB Shomari Lawrence figures to get the bulk of the carries, with true freshman King Davis expected to bring some speed to the backfield. The Bears look to replace four of their top five receivers, and the position could see James BlackStrain, Jmariyae Robinson or Ronnel Johnson stepping into featured roles.

The offensive line needs to take a step forward, especially in the ground game, after MSU averaged only 118.6 rushing yards per game. The offensive line will have solid continuity, as it returns four starters from last year.

DEFENSE Several questions remain about how the Bears will fare defensively after all of their starting linebackers and two corners entered the transfer portal following the 2024 season. FCS Campbell transfer Jalen Brooks figures to step into a significant role at linebacker, while Thomas Anderson takes over at one of the starting corners. The safety duo of J.J. O'Neal and Maguire Neal should be one of the strengths of the entire team.

The Bears averaged an impressive 2.6 sacks per game last season, but they will need pass-rushers like Davon Townley Jr. and Oregon State transfer DJ Wesolak to step up after several graduation departures. MSU's run defense struggled at times, allowing 178 rushing yards per contest. The Bears will need to add several pieces, including starting-caliber players, through the transfer portal ahead of their kickoff game at USC in late August.

SPECIALISTS Yousef Obeid was a reliable placekicker, making 11 of his 12 field-goal attempts, including a long of 50. The Bears will replace three-time FCS All-American punter Grant Burkett with redshirt freshman Stewart McDonald. Competition is open to return both punts and kickoffs.

FINAL ANALYSIS Missouri State is a first-year FBS program, so expectations won't be too high for a team that hasn't defeated an FBS opponent since 1990. Throughout a year in which they are ineligible for a bowl game, the Bears will hope that their explosive offense carries over from one subdivision to the next and that the defense makes strides. The 2025 season for the Bears is about showing that they belong.

2024 RESULTS (8-4, 6-2) (FCS: MVFC)

Aug. 31	at Montana	L	24-29
Sept. 7	at Ball State	L	34-42
Sept. 14	Lindenwood	W	28-14
Sept. 21	at Tennessee-Martin	W	31-24
Sept. 28	Youngstown State	W	38-31
Oct. 12	at Illinois State	W	41-7
Oct. 19	Indiana State	W	46-21
Oct. 26	at Northern Iowa	W	49-42
Nov. 2	Southern Illinois	W	38-17
Nov. 9	at Murray State	W	59-31
Nov. 16	at North Dakota State	L	21-59
Nov. 23	South Dakota State	L	9-45

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at USC
Sept. 6	at Marshall
Sept. 13	SMU
Sept. 20	Tennessee-Martin
Sept. 27	WKU
Oct. 8	at Middle Tennessee
Oct. 22	at New Mexico St.
Oct. 29	FIU
Nov. 8	at Liberty
Nov. 15	UTEP
Nov. 22	at Kennesaw State
Nov. 29	Louisiana Tech

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kheaton Kinney, DL	★★★
2.	Haydon Caston, S	★★★
3.	Brayden Thompson, OT	★★★
4.	Ryan Grayson, ATH	★★★
5.	Amare Whetsell, WR	★★★
6.	Donald Quist, S	★★★
7.	Caleb Olabode, LB	★★★
8.	Breylon McCuller, EDGE	★★★
9.	Anthony Bell, WR	★★★
10.	Dezmond Barnes, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Beard • Record at School: 12-11 (2 years) • Career Record: 12-11 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nick Petrino
Defensive Coordinator: L.D. Scott • Location: Springfield, Mo. • Stadium: Robert W. Plaster Stadium (17,500)

NEW MEXICO STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 132 | CUSA PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE The Aggies hope that transfer Logan Fife can fix their quarterback issues from last season. Fife started eight games for FCS Montana last season and threw for 1,890 yards, with 14 touchdowns and two interceptions. Transfers Dijon Stanley and Kadarius Calloway will be NMSU's top two RBs and should bring plenty of speed to the backfield.

Central Michigan transfer tight end Gavin Harris highlights the Aggies' new pass-catchers; Harris caught 11 passes last season and scored a touchdown. PJ Johnson III and All-Conference USA≠≠≠ freshman TJ Pride return after leading the Aggies in receiving last season. Pride amassed 374 receiving yards.

NMSU returns one starting offensive lineman in BJ Tolo and will have four new players up front. North Texas transfer Ma'Kyi Lee highlights the O-line newcomers after starting three games for the Mean Green at tackle last season.

DEFENSE Gabe Peterson, who posted 5.5 sacks at NMSU from 2022-23, returns to the Aggies after one season at Utah State. Tyler Martinez and Sone Aupiui also return as NMSU's top linebackers after combining for 151 tackles in 2024.

Look for Bernock Iya, an all-conference player at Tyler (Texas) Junior College, to get safety and nickelback snaps. Dakerric Hobbs returns as the Aggies' top cornerback after recording six pass breakups last season, and he looks to be an all-conference player again after he received the honor at Sam Houston in 2023.

Nick Session is also a key returner for NMSU at safety and should be a veteran leader in the secondary.

SPECIALISTS NMSU will miss placekicker Abraham Montaño, who broke a school record with a 59-yard field goal last season. David Barker is the primary candidate to replace him after coming from the ProKick Australia academy. Fellow Australian Max Dean is NMSU's new punter, replacing George Eberle, while Pride, Larenzo McMillan and Tyler King will be the Aggies' primary returners.

FINAL ANALYSIS NMSU's offense should be more balanced this season with a better quarterback and a new offensive scheme under coordinator David Yost in head coach Tony Sanchez's second season with the Aggies. The defense has more familiar faces than the offense, but it's a defense that struggled to defend deep passes and get pressure on quarterbacks in 2024. The offense has plenty of playmakers, but the defense may struggle to correct its deficiencies from last season.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 31	SE Missouri State	W	23-16
Sept. 7	Liberty	L	24-30
Sept. 14	at Fresno State	L	0-48
Sept. 21	at Sam Houston	L	11-31
Sept. 28	New Mexico	L	40-50
Oct. 9	at Jacksonville State	L	13-54
Oct. 15	Louisiana Tech (ot)	W	33-30
Oct. 29	at FIU	L	13-34
Nov. 9	WKU	L	28-41
Nov. 16	at Texas A&M	L	3-38
Nov. 23	at Middle Tennessee	W	36-21
Nov. 30	UTEP	L	35-42

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Bryant
Sept. 6	Tulsa
Sept. 13	at Louisiana Tech
Sept. 27	at New Mexico
Oct. 2	Sam Houston
Oct. 14	at Liberty
Oct. 22	Missouri State
Nov. 1	at WKU
Nov. 8	Kennesaw State
Nov. 15	at Tennessee
Nov. 22	at UTEP
Nov. 29	Middle Tennessee

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaylen Patterson, QB	★★★
2.	DJ Hill-Smith, S	★★★
3.	Anthony Rose, S	★★★
4.	Walter Owens, S	★★★
5.	Ziggy Loa, EDGE	★★★
6.	Bernock Iya, S	★★★
7.	Brodrick Malone, WR	★★★
8.	Raylon Carter, EDGE	★★★
9.	Sam Garcia, IOL	★★★
10.	Zaiden Davis, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Sanchez • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 23-49 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: David Yost
Defensive Coordinator: Joe Morris • Location: Las Cruces, N.M. • Stadium: Aggie Memorial Stadium (28,853)

DAKERRIC HOBBS

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"A lot of the programs coming off big seasons with new coaches should look at what happened to these guys last year. You have to start from scratch in this league. ... [OC] David Yost is a good pickup because they couldn't really attack you in any effective way. They struggled in the red zone a lot. I'd expect them to want to move the ball a lot faster on offense, but they don't really have a quarterback on the roster that makes you worry. ... This is still a rebuilding project, and no one really thinks they're going back to the level that [Jerry] Kill and [Diego] Pavia had them at. This is a really hard place to win, and it's basically impossible to sustain success there."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	0	**PJ JOHNSON III (SR.)**	3	Shawn Brown (Jr.)
WR	11	Jackson Owens (Sr.)	83	AJ Williams (So.)
WR	7	**TJ PRIDE (SO.)**	12	Tyler King (Jr.)
LT	55	Ma'Kyi Lee (Sr.)	72	Merrick Becerra (Fr.)
LG	50	Kai Wheeler (So.)	65	JR Hecklinski (Fr.)
C	76	Armando Nieves (So.)		Sam Garcia (Fr.)
RG	61	**BJ TOLO (SO.)**	58	Sioeli Helu (Sr.)
RT	73	Janik Ogunlade (Sr.)	74	Elijah Harvey (So.)
TE	24	Gavin Harris (Jr.)	86	Jerry Lydiatt (So.)
QB	4	Logan Fife (Sr.)	10	Jaylen Patterson (Fr.)
RB	8	Dijon Stanley (Jr.)		Kadarius Calloway (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

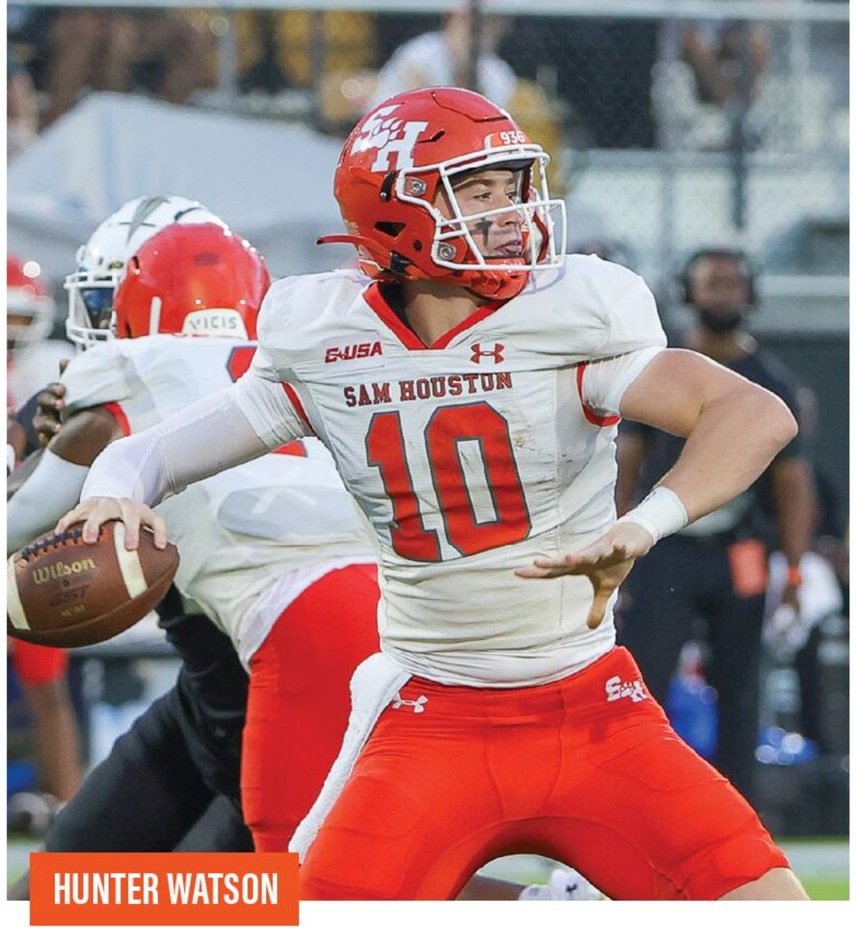
DE	16	Gabe Peterson (Sr.)	4	Justin Beadles (Sr.)
NT	96	Cole Schnettgoecke (Sr.)	54	Ta'Avili Tuitama (Sr.)
DT	97	Henry Davis III (Jr.)	44	Enzo Pierre-Tayou (Sr.)
JACK	25	Obinna Okeke (So.)	28	Jaden Robinson (Jr.)
LB	35	**TYLER MARTINEZ (SR.)**	10	Chance Barron (Jr.)
LB	14	**SONE AUPIU (JR.)**	13	Quincy Davis (Jr.)
CB	3	**DAKERRIC HOBBS (SR.)**	7	Saveon Freeman (Jr.)
CB	1	Josiah Charles (Jr.)	22	Lanar Kelley Jr. (Sr.)
NB	9	Bernock Iya (Jr.)	21	Zedekiah Rodriguez-Brown (Sr.)
S	0	DJ Hill-Smith (Jr.)	11	Walter Owens (Jr.)
S	5	Nick Session (Sr.)	20	DJ Cloyd (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	David Barker (Fr.)	KR	16	Larenzo McMillan (Sr.)
P	32	Max Dean (So.)	PR	7	TJ Pride (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARIA LYSAKER-IMAGN IMAGES



HUNTER WATSON

MIKE WATTERS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BEARKATS

"This is another program coming off a strong season starting fresh. They've got a new coach, they're playing away from home all year and they've turned over a lot of guys. ... You know what you're getting with Phil Longo in the state of Texas. They're gonna rip it. The biggest thing to watch for is Longo settling on a quarterback early and getting them ready to go. ... Defensively, the previous staff is at North Texas, and they took just about everyone else with them, too. They're starting fresh, and that's really hard for [defensive coordinator Freddie] Aughtry-Lindsay because Longo is going to push the tempo on the other side of the ball. It could look really messy before it starts to click here. They could be scoring a bunch of points in a few seasons, though."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (5)		
WR	7	**QUA'VEZ HUMPHREYS (SR.)**		Kaleb Black (So.)
WR	4	Michael Phoenix II (Sr.)	15	Shane Johnson (Sr.)
WR		Aviyon Smith-Mack (Jr.)	11	Malik Phillips (Sr.)
LT	56	**LUKE ECKARDT (SR.)**	79	Kolt Dieterich (So.)
LG	70	**RHETT LARSON (JR.)**		Payton McDonald (Jr.)
C		Zo'maryon Bryan (Jr.)	54	Mich'le Joseph (Jr.)
RG	71	**JAMES DAWN II (SR.)**	68	Jeremiah Edmond (So.)
RT	59	Graceson Jackson-Smith (Sr.)	79	Kolt Dieterich (So.)
TE	89	Fernando Garza III (Sr.)		Rayfield Lotten (So.)
QB	10	**HUNTER WATSON (SR.)**		Mabrey Mettauer (Fr.)
RB		Elijah Green (Sr.)		Alton McCaskill (Sr.)
		DEFENSE (0)		
DE		Keelan Cox (Sr.)	57	Ryan Gilleylen (Jr.)
DT		AJ Sargent (Sr.)	97	Dylan Frazier (Jr.)
DT		Zeiqui Lawton (Sr.)	58	Joshua Frayre (So.)
DE	42	Ca'lub Holloway (Jr.)		JaMair Diaz (Jr.)
LB	28	CJ Johnson (Sr.)	35	Gannon Tullos (Jr.)
LB		Antavious Fish (Sr.)	45	Eli Wallace (So.)
CB	7	Emon Allen (Sr.)	21	Dravon Wilson (So.)
CB		Jace Arnold (Jr.)	12	Tyler Bailey (Jr.)
NB		Alonzo Edwards (Sr.)	16	Joe Swen (So.)
S		Cecil Powell (Sr.)	22	Jaidan Scott (Jr.)
S		Trey Harris (Sr.)		Jalyn Stanford (So.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	47	Colby Sessums (Jr.)	KR 11	Malik Phillips (Sr.)
P	49	Christian Pavon (Sr.)	PR 7	Emon Allen (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAM HOUSTON BEARKATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 115 | CUSA PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 CUSA

OFFENSE New head coach Phil Longo is back on familiar soil, as he served as Sam Houston's offensive coordinator from 2014-16. Longo inherits good pieces on offense from a 10-win team, headlined by quarterback Hunter Watson, who had 12 touchdown passes and nine rushing scores last fall. Mabrey Mettauer, a 4-star recruit from Texas who followed Longo to Wisconsin and then back to his home state, will push Watson.

The passing game could be a strength as Sam Houston returns two of its top five receivers in Qua'Vez Humphreys and Michael Phoenix II, who combined for seven of the team's 15 touchdown catches. Arizona State transfer Kaleb Black will vie for catches in Longo's Air Raid-style attack.

Up front, key holdovers return at both guard (James Dawn II, Rhett Larson) and tackle (Luke Eckardt, Kolt Dieterich). The keys will be building the center position and integrating transfers from different levels.

Running back is transfer-heavy with Elijah Green (Indiana), Alton McCaskill (Arizona State) and others. Fernando Garza III slides into the top tight end spot.

DEFENSE Coordinator Freddie Aughtry-Lindsay's unit will look dramatically different after numerous departures. Sam Houston will lean on productive transfers at all three levels. Keelan Cox could anchor the pass rush after recording six sacks, two forced fumbles and nine tackles for a loss last season at FCS Texas Southern. Like Cox, defensive tackle transfer AJ Sargent is hoping to prove himself at the FBS level.

Senior linebacker CJ Johnson is one of few returning defenders who contributed last season, recording 16 tackles and two fumble recoveries. Akron transfer Antavious Fish (68 tackles in '24) will join him.

The secondary has a transfer tinge as Jace Arnold, who came with Longo from Wisconsin, joins Trey Harris (FCS Cornell), Cecil Powell (Troy) and others. Bearkats veteran Emon Allen is back.

SPECIALISTS There are options at kicker with Colby Sessums, who went 11-of-14 on field-goal attempts in 2023 before missing last season due to injury, and Christian Pavon, who handled the placekicking duties in 2024. Both also can punt. Senior Malik Phillips should be a factor on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS After a challenging stint as Wisconsin's offensive coordinator, Longo is back in a comfort zone, with a program that was an FCS power and then showed it could win in the FBS. He has enough returnees and talented transfers to deliver on offense. The defense is a bigger question with so many new faces. Another factor is the schedule, as Sam Houston will play its home games at Shell Energy Stadium in Houston while Bowers Stadium on campus in Huntsville, Texas, is renovated.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 CUSA)

Aug. 31	at Rice	W	34-14
Sept. 7	at UCF	L	14-45
Sept. 14	Hawai'i	W	31-13
Sept. 21	New Mexico State	W	31-11
Sept. 28	Texas State	W	40-39
Oct. 3	at UTEP	W	41-21
Oct. 16	WKU	L	14-31
Oct. 22	at FIU	W	10-7
Oct. 29	Louisiana Tech	W	9-3
Nov. 16	at Kennesaw State (ot)	W	23-17
Nov. 23	at Jacksonville State	L	11-21
Nov. 29	Liberty	W	20-18
Dec. 19	vs. Georgia Southern #	W	31-26

#New Orleans Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	at WKU
Aug. 30	UNLV
Sept. 6	at Hawa'i
Sept. 20	at Texas
Oct. 2	at New Mexico St.
Oct. 9	Jacksonville State
Oct. 15	UTEP
Oct. 28	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 8	at Oregon State
Nov. 15	Delaware
Nov. 22	at Middle Tennessee
Nov. 29	FIU

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Braylen Wortham, S	★★★
2.	Landyn Locke, QB	★★★
3.	Caius Coy, EDGE	★★★
4.	Jax Brown, QB	★★★
5.	Logan Cahill, IOL	★★★
6.	Anthony Shorter, EDGE	★★★
7.	Jayveon Johnson, LB	★★★
8.	London Deyon, WR	★★★
9.	Brody Henderson, EDGE	★★★
10.	Graceson Spann, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Phil Longo • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 7-14 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Zach Patterson
Defensive Coordinator: Freddie Aughtry-Lindsay
Location: Hunstville, Texas • Stadium: Shell Energy Stadium (20,656)

UTEP MINERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 111 | CUSA PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 3-5 CUSA

OFFENSE UTEP struggled to score in its first season under head coach Scotty Walden, and the hope is that another year in his up-tempo spread system will see some better results with similar personnel.

The Miners, though, will start in the same spot, reprising the quarterback battle between Skyler Locklear and Cade McConnell that defined 2024. They both started games before McConnell suffered a season-ending wrist injury that also kept him out of the spring.

There was an early assumption that former 5-star recruit Malachi Nelson would find his way to the top of the depth chart after transferring from Boise State, but he didn't work his way up from No. 4 in spring, and Locklear seems the best bet to take the first snaps of the season.

Whoever takes the reins will have a proven set of receivers led by Kenny Odom and Kam Thomas and some continuity in front of them on a line led by senior guard Joseph Immediato.

One area of concern: the running game, which needs to be more explosive. Charlotte transfer Hahsaun Wilson could provide that.

DEFENSE The Miners defense emerged as a bright spot as last season progressed, then had a coordinator change when J.J. Clark left for the Dallas Cowboys. The 3-3-5 system will be largely the same under new coordinator Bobby Daly, but the personnel is turning over.

A trio of returning starters — end KD Johnson, linebacker Nate Dyman and safety Xavier Smith — will be the anchors of a defense that will revolve around the linebackers. Stratton Shufelt, in particular, had a big spring after making an impact last year as a true freshman, and Jaylin Jones in the linebacker/end hybrid Bandit position is also looking to turn a promising true freshman year into a standout sophomore year.

The challenge will be to maintain the pass rush with a mostly new line. End Elijah Baltwin will get his shot.

SPECIALISTS Outside of some nice returns from Thomas, the special teams were a sinkhole for the Miners last year, and they sifted through 12 specialists during spring practice. Given that incumbent kicker Buzz Flabiano hit the transfer portal as soon as spring ended, that competition will continue up to the opener. Joe Bowman was the backup kicker last year. Transfer Noah Botsford will try to improve the punting.

FINAL ANALYSIS Walden generated some excitement in a starving fan base by landing the two highest-rated recruiting classes in program history, and those players are starting to appear on the depth chart. For this season to be successful, that youth is going to have to make an early impact for a team that, on paper, looks similar to last year's 3-9 squad.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 3-5 CUSA)

Aug. 31	at Nebraska	L	7-40
Sept. 7	Southern Utah	L	24-27
Sept. 14	at Liberty	L	10-28
Sept. 21	at Colorado State	L	17-27
Oct. 3	Sam Houston	L	21-41
Oct. 10	at WKU	L	17-44
Oct. 16	FIU	W	30-21
Oct. 22	at Louisiana Tech	L	10-14
Nov. 2	Middle Tennessee	L	13-20
Nov. 9	Kennesaw State	W	43-35
Nov. 23	at Tennessee	L	0-56
Nov. 30	at New Mexico State	W	42-35

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Utah State
Sept. 6	Tennessee-Martin
Sept. 13	at Texas
Sept. 20	ULM
Sept. 27	Louisiana Tech
Oct. 8	Liberty
Oct. 15	at Sam Houston
Oct. 28	at Kennesaw State
Nov. 8	Jacksonville State
Nov. 15	at Missouri State
Nov. 22	New Mexico State
Nov. 29	at Delaware

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jamal Frilot, EDGE	★★★
2.	Ryland Bradford, WR	★★★
3.	Allen Gant, S	★★★
4.	Elijah McCoy, RB	★★★
5.	Darnell Williams, ATH	★★★
6.	Nik Henry, WR	★★★
7.	CJ Simon, WR	★★★
8.	Grant Stewart, S	★★★
9.	TJ Tillman, S	★★★
10.	Chad Warner, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scotty Walden • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 37-29 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mark Cala
Defensive Coordinator: Bobby Daly • Location: El Paso, Texas • Stadium: Sun Bowl (51,500)

SKYLER LOCKLEAR

SCOUTING THE MINERS

"Credit to the staff taking their lumps early last season. They put out the guys they wanted to develop and whatever else they had and they worked through that losing streak. ... They're recruiting better in Texas than the previous staff. You can see what they want to do in-state long term. They pulled some guys that surprised us. ... If they can flip [Malachi] Nelson into the star he was supposed to be, that could change this entire program overnight. It's a huge question mark because he's lost the starting job at two other schools, but you take that risk on a kid that talented, especially with what you've got on the roster. ... They're trying to build momentum on those wins late in the season. They will definitely be more talented and execute better with that offensive system. They're a 'maybe' breakout team."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	3	Jaden Smith (Sr.)	80	Marcus Torres (Fr.)
WR	**6**	**KENNY ODOM (JR.)**	0	Ashton Nickelberry (Sr.)
WR	**5**	**KAM THOMAS (SR.)**	84	Aramoni Rhone (Jr.)
LT	66	Mark Robinson (So.)	70	Luka Matamoros (Fr.)
LG	69	James Williams (So.)	**53**	**IVAN ESCOBAR (SR.)**
C	63	Rolando Beltran (Jr.)	53	Ivan Escobar (Sr.)
RG	60	Joseph Immediato (Sr.)	72	Tyrone D. McDuffie III (So.)
RT	79	Jake Utley (So.)	56	Luis Carlos Aranda (Jr.)
TE	82	Judah Ezinwa (Jr.)	17	Cash Cheeks (Jr.)
QB	**9**	**SKYLER LOCKLEAR (JR.)**	11	Cade McConnell (Sr.)
RB	14	Hahsaun Wilson (Sr.)	4	Ashten Emory (Fr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	32	Elijah Baldwin (Fr.)	11	Derek Burns (Jr.)
DT	96	Kelton Farmer (Jr.)	90	Ashton Coker (So.)
DE	**7**	**KD JOHNSON (SR.)**	11	Derek Burns (Jr.)
BAN	17	Jaylin Jones (So.)	0	Udoka Ezeani (Sr.)
MLB	8	Stratton Shufelt (So.)	6	Ekow Taylor (So.)
OLB	**30**	**NATE DYMAN (SR.)**	10	Jayden Wilson (Jr.)
CB	18	Justin Content (So.)	9	Jaylon Shelton (Sr.)
CB	4	Neil Campbell (Sr.)	12	A'tiq Muhammad (Jr.)
S	**2**	**XAVIER SMITH (JR.)**	24	Jaime Guerrero (Jr.)
S	5	Solo Barnes (Sr.)	21	Tyler Jones (Sr.)
S	22	Lantz Russell (Sr.)	15	Kode Lowe (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Joe Bowman (Sr.)	KR	5	Kam Thomas (Sr.)
P	42	Noah Botsford (Jr.)	PR	5	Kam Thomas (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

OMAR ORNELAS / EL PASO TIMES

K.D. HUTCHINSON

SCOUTING THE HILLTOPPERS

"This is one of the best programs in the Group of 5 and all of college football at adapting quickly and finding success with new coaches and players. Tyson [Helton] has been importing OCs and their QBs for a while now. He should write a book on it. Now it's the OC and QB from Abilene [Christian], and they'll probably hit the ground running. ... The upside of the constant change is that they're grabbing players who are rising stars, but the downside is that they really struggle for the kind of consistency and depth that wins you a conference championship. Helton has a really strong formula on how to stay winning in this portal era, but they haven't jumped up as a notable G5 program. That's their next step, and it's probably not this season."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	15	K.D. Hutchinson (Jr.)	14	Jairus Mack (Sr.)
WR	17	Matthew Henry (Sr.)	80	Cameron Flowers (Fr.)
WR	18	Moussa Barry (Jr.)	13	Kelby Williams (Sr.)
LT	53	Marshall Jackson (Sr.)	78	Hackman Pierre (Fr.)
LG	77	Melvin Collins Jr. (Jr.)	76	Max Thurston (So.)
C	73	Elijah Williams (Fr.)	68	Gabe Claybrook (Fr.)
RG	50	Laurence Seymore (Sr.)	52	Isiah Stoudemire (Fr.)
RT	**70**	**JEMEIL JACKSON (SR.)**	65	Devon Smith (Sr.)
TE	81	Noah Meyers (So.)	48	Jackson West (Sr.)
QB	10	Maverick McIvor (Sr.)	16	Rodney Tisdale Jr. (Fr.)
RB	9	George Hart III (Sr.)	11	La'Vell Wright (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	55	Venson Sneed (Jr.)	95	Jayden Gray (Sr.)
DL	92	Rylen Su'a-Filo (Sr.)	90	Chukwunedu Okeke (Fr.)
DL	52	Jakeem Fletcher (Sr.)	45	Al Sandifer (Jr.)
LB	44	Harper Holloman (So.)	34	Koron Hayward (So.)
LB	31	Anthony Brackenridge (Sr.)	48	Zsacari Minnis (Fr.)
LB	32	Kennon Loftin (Jr.)	30	Dominic Oliver (Sr.)
CB	**11**	**KENT ROBINSON (JR.)**	25	Xavion "Tutu" Griffin (Fr.)
CB	6	Nazir Ward (So.)	14	Braxton Myers (So.)
NB	**7**	**DEMARKO WILLIAMS (SR.)**	20	Jalen Emery (Sr.)
S	29	Joshua Mensah (Jr.)	26	Jai Eugene Jr. (So.)
S	19	Virgil Marshall (Jr.)	23	Jaylen Lewis (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	John Cannon (Sr.)	KR	9 George Hart III (Sr.)
P	18	Cole Maynard (Sr.)	PR	15 K.D. Hutchinson (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WILL MCLELLAND-USA TODAY SPORTS

WKU HILLTOPPERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 89 | CUSA PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 8-6, 6-2 CUSA

OFFENSE Seventh-year WKU head coach Tyson Helton ripped a page from an old playbook following the transfer loss of last year's starting quarterback, Caden Veltkamp, now at Florida Atlantic. Four years ago, Helton dipped into the FCS ranks to recharge his offense by hiring offensive coordinator Zach Kittley away from Houston Baptist. HBU starting quarterback Bailey Zappe came along, and that duo spearheaded an offense that rewrote the NCAA record books.

The Hilltoppers are hoping for that same magic with new OC Rick Bowie and quarterback Maverick McIvor, who arrived from FCS Abilene Christian and a similarly productive offense. McIvor had a breakout year with 3,828 passing yards and 30 touchdowns after Bowie joined the staff.

Portal defections and graduation losses hit the Hilltoppers hard after last year's 8-6 campaign. Left tackle Marshall Jackson provides needed stability on an almost entirely rebuilt offensive line. Redshirt junior K.D. Hutchinson (25 catches, 383 yards, three TDs) is the most productive returning wide receiver, with the Tops landing potential impact transfers including FCS All-American Matthew Henry (64 catches for 1,211 yards, six TDs at Western Illinois in 2024). Redshirt sophomore tight end Noah Meyers (seven catches, 123 yards, TD) emerged late last season.

DEFENSE The Tyson Summers era is over at WKU, but the former defensive coordinator's gambling ways will continue under his successors — co-coordinators Da'Von Brown and Davis Merritt, both members of Summers' staff last season. Summers, now the DC at Colorado State, built a unit that annually ranked among the nation's best in takeaways. Expect the Tops to remain multiple but employ more 4-3 base this season.

WKU lost its top 12 tacklers, but redshirt senior Demarko Williams (37 tackles, two INTs) and redshirt junior Kent Robinson (33 tackles, four pass breakups) are solid returning options in the secondary. Senior linebacker Anthony Brackenridge has been a mainstay over three seasons, while sophomore linebacker Harper Holloman was named Spring Defensive MVP.

SPECIALISTS Lucas Carneiro, the Conference USA Special Teams Player of the Year who went 18-of-19 on field-goal attempts, hit the portal and now plays for Ole Miss. Senior punter Cole Maynard averaged 42.7 yards per punt last year and is poised to resume his starting duties. Hutchinson is back after serving as WKU's primary punt returner last year.

FINAL ANALYSIS Both coordinators are gone, along with a massive chunk of a team that reached the CUSA title game last season. Still, Helton has been adept at using the portal to reload quickly, so don't be surprised if the Tops are still vying for a seventh consecutive bowl appearance.

2024 RESULTS (8-6, 6-2 CUSA)

Aug. 31	at Alabama	L	0-63
Sept. 7	Eastern Kentucky	W	31-0
Sept. 14	at Middle Tennessee	W	49-21
Sept. 21	Toledo	W	26-21
Sept. 28	at Boston College	L	20-21
Oct. 10	UTEP	W	44-17
Oct. 16	at Sam Houston	W	31-14
Oct. 30	Kennesaw State	W	31-14
Nov. 9	at New Mexico State	W	41-28
Nov. 16	Louisiana Tech	L	7-12
Nov. 23	at Liberty	L	21-38
Nov. 30	Jacksonville State	W	19-17
Dec. 6	at Jacksonville State #	L	12-52
Dec. 18	vs. James Madison %	L	17-27

#CUSA Championship %Boca Raton Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	Sam Houston
Aug. 30	North Alabama
Sept. 6	at Toledo
Sept. 20	Nevada
Sept. 27	at Missouri State
Oct. 3	at Delaware
Oct. 14	FIU
Oct. 21	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 1	New Mexico State
Nov. 15	Middle Tennessee
Nov. 22	at LSU
Nov. 29	at Jacksonville St.

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brandon Thomas, EDGE	★★★
2.	Fonzy Smith, WR	★★★
3.	Cross Nimmo, TE	★★★
4.	Jordan Donald, LB	★★★
5.	Dylan Vickerson, WR	★★★
6.	Sekou Peters, DL	★★★
7.	Sharlandiin Strange, EDGE	★★★
8.	Jordan Bergeron, CB	★★★
9.	Elijah Rumph, RB	★★★
10.	Isiah Stoudemire, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tyson Helton • Record at School: 48-32 (6 years)
Career Record: 48-32 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Rick Bowie
Defensive Coordinators: Da'Von Brown, Davis Merritt • Location: Bowling Green, Ky. • Stadium: Houchens Industries–L.T. Smith Stadium (22,113)

NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

NATIONAL FORECAST: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 14-2

OFFENSE Notre Dame will likely turn to redshirt freshman CJ Carr at quarterback after his strong spring performance. Carr has elite arm talent and an advanced grasp of the offense, and as he gains more experience, he should help revitalize the Fighting Irish's struggling passing attack.

Having arguably the best backfield in the nation helps take some of the pressure off of Carr. Jeremiyah Love and Jadarian Price combined for 1,871 yards and 24 touchdowns on the ground last season. Love was a breakout star and enters this season as one of the top players in the country.

Wide receiver Jaden Greathouse broke out in the College Football Playoff, hauling in a combined 13 passes for 233 yards and three touchdowns against Penn State and Ohio State. Notre Dame is hoping that was the beginning of things to come for Greathouse. Adding Virginia transfer Malachi Fields gives the Irish a chance to have an impact 1-2 punch at receiver. Eli Raridon has a chance to be Notre Dame's next star at tight end if he can remain healthy.

DEFENSE First-year defensive coordinator Chris Ash has huge shoes to fill with Al Golden off to the NFL. The good news for Ash is that he inherits a deep and talented defense. Despite the loss of All-American Xavier Watts, the Irish secondary remains loaded. Sophomore Leonard Moore is a rising star and will pair with Christian Gray to form one of the nation's best corner duos. Safety Adon Shuler is also poised for a breakout season after learning alongside Watts last season. Notre Dame returns a talented linebacker group led by Drayk Bowen and Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa.

Notre Dame also has a deep edge rotation, with veterans Joshua Burnham and Junior Tuihalamaka teaming up with athletic young ends Bryce Young, Boubacar Traore and Loghan Thomas to give the Irish a chance to have its best pass-rushing line in several seasons.

SPECIALISTS Notre Dame's kicking game struggled last season, as the Irish tied for 127th nationally with a 55.6% field-goal success rate. Former North Carolina kicker Noah Burnette hopes to rectify that. The spring didn't provide much clarity regarding who will handle return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Marcus Freeman emerged as one of the nation's top coaches after leading the Irish to the national title game in his third season. If the Irish maintain their high level of play on defense, a return to the College Football Playoff is likely. How far they go once they get there will be largely determined by how much improvement coordinator Mike Denbrock can make with the offense.

2024 RESULTS (14-2)

Aug. 31	at Texas A&M	W	23-13
Sept. 7	Northern Illinois	L	14-16
Sept. 14	at Purdue	W	66-7
Sept. 21	Miami (Ohio)	W	28-3
Sept. 28	Louisville	W	31-24
Oct. 12	Stanford	W	49-7
Oct. 19	at Georgia Tech	W	31-13
Oct. 26	vs. Navy #	W	51-14
Nov. 9	Florida State	W	52-3
Nov. 16	Virginia	W	35-14
Nov. 23	vs. Army %	W	49-14
Nov. 30	at USC	W	49-35
Dec. 20	Indiana &	W	27-17
Jan. 2	vs. Georgia $	W	23-10
Jan. 9	vs. Penn State !	W	27-24
Jan. 20	vs. Ohio State ^	L	23-34

#East Rutherford, N.J. %Bronx &CFB Playoff First Round
$Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal
!Orange Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal
^Atlanta: CFB Playoff National Championship

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Miami (Fla.)
Sept. 13	Texas A&M
Sept. 20	Purdue
Sept. 27	at Arkansas
Oct. 4	Boise State
Oct. 11	NC State
Oct. 18	USC
Nov. 1	at Boston College
Nov. 8	Navy
Nov. 15	at Pitt
Nov. 22	Syracuse
Nov. 29	at Stanford

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Will Black, OT ★★★★★
2. Christopher Burgess Jr., DL ★★★★
3. JaDon Blair, S ★★★★
4. Mark Zackery IV, CB ★★★★
5. James Flanigan, TE ★★★★
6. Dallas Golden, CB ★★★★
7. Madden Faraimo, LB ★★★★
8. Cam Herron, IOL ★★★★
9. Nolan James Jr., RB ★★★★
10. Brandon Logan, S ★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Marcus Freeman • Record at School: 33-10 (3+ years)
Career Record: 33-10 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Denbrock
Defensive Coordinator: Chris Ash • Location: South Bend, Ind.
Stadium: Notre Dame Stadium (77,622)

JEREMIYAH LOVE

SCOUTING THE FIGHTING IRISH

"They might've had the same ending in a national title game, but football people understand the difference between the kind of roster [Marcus] Freeman has built vs. the staff before. National titles are the standard here, but this is definitely a changed program for the better. ... With [Steve] Angeli gone, it seems like [CJ] Carr is the favorite to win the starting QB job. ... If [Jeremiyah] Love doesn't have a Heisman season, it might be because there's so much quality at that position. They've got a lot of talent in the backfield. ... It's a safe bet you're going to see a lot more mixed coverages with [Chris] Ash as the DC. They were dead to rights against Ohio State on the outside playing man. That defense is really talented, even losing some key leaders. ... Overall, this is the most consistent we've seen the program in a long time."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	1	**JADEN GREATHOUSE (JR.)**	2	Will Pauling (Sr.)
WR		Malachi Fields (Sr.)	14	Micah Gilbert (Fr.)
WR	6	Jordan Faison (Jr.)	11	KK Smith (So.)
LT	54	**ANTHONIE KNAPP (SO.)**	71	Styles Prescod (Fr.)
LG	74	**BILLY SCHRAUTH (JR.)**	75	Sullivan Absher (So.)
C	70	**ASHTON CRAIG (JR.)**	64	Joe Otting (So.)
RG	56	Charles Jagusah (So.)	75	Sullivan Absher (So.)
RT	59	**AAMIL WAGNER (JR.)**	76	Guerby Lambert (Fr.)
TE	9	Eli Raridon (Sr.)	84	Kevin Bauman (Sr.)
QB	13	CJ Carr (Fr.)	8	Kenny Minchey (So.)
RB	4	**JEREMIYAH LOVE (JR.)**	24	Jadarian Price (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	40	**JOSHUA BURNHAM (JR.)**	30	Bryce Young (So.)
DT	97	Gabriel Rubio (Sr.)	93	Jared Dawson (Sr.)
DT	47	Jason Onye (Sr.)	41	Donovan Hinish (Jr.)
DE	5	Boubacar Traore (So.)	44	Junior Tuihalamaka (Sr.)
LB	34	**DRAYK BOWEN (JR.)**	27	Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (So.)
LB	3	Jaylen Sneed (Jr.)	4	Jaiden Ausberry (So.)
CB	2	**LEONARD MOORE (SO.)**	20	Cree Thomas (Fr.)
CB	29	**CHRISTIAN GRAY (JR.)**	21	Karson Hobbs (So.)
NB	0	DeVonta Smith (Sr.)	13	Ben Minich (So.)
S	8	**ADON SHULER (SO.)**	16	Tae Johnson (Fr.)
S	28	Luke Talich (Jr.)	7	Jalen Stroman (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Noah Burnette (Sr.)	KR	24	Jadarian Price (Jr.)
P	16	James Rendell (Sr.)	PR	2	Will Pauling (Sr)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MATT CASHORE-IMAGN IMAGES

SKYLER BELL

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"Give Jim [L. Mora] credit — he put an attitude back into this program. The expectation here is totally different than it's been in years. They've been active in the portal, and he's been vocal about NIL, and the overall talent level reflects that. It's still hard for them outside of a conference to sell their 'level' of ball. They lost a really good quarterback prospect in the portal this spring, and it shows how hard it is to maintain that high-G5 level of expectation that this program should have. ... Their schedule is very manageable, and they're better than last season, so expect them to win more games in the short term. The future here is always a question as an independent, but they're performing at the peak of any realistic expectation right now."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)				
WR	1	**SKYLER BELL (SR.)**	19	Jackson Harper (So.)
WR	5	Shamar Porter (So.)	80	John Neider (So.)
WR	6	Raymello Murphy (Sr.)	13	Chris Parker (Sr.)
LT	79	Danny Antolovich (Sr.)	76	Toriyan Johnson (So.)
LG	58	Kyle Juergens (Sr.)	69	Ty Chan (Jr.)
C	**73**	**WES HOEH (SR.)**	52	Deron McLaughlin (Fr.)
RG	**77**	**BEN MURAWSKI (JR.)**	66	Brady Wayburn (So.)
RT	78	Carsten Casady (So.)	50	Tank Green (Sr.)
TE	**81**	**LOUIS HANSEN (SR.)**	86	Alex Honig (Sr.)
QB	2	Joe Fagnano (Sr.)	**3**	**NICK EVERS (JR.)**
RB	**0**	**CAM EDWARDS (JR.)**	24	MJ Flowers (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	55	Vincent Carroll-Jackson (So.)	1	Ben Smiley (Sr.)
DT	33	Kervins Choute (Sr.)	55	Vincent Carroll-Jackson (So.)
DT	5	Aaron Key (Sr.)	92	Stephon Wright (Jr.)
SLB	11	Donovan Branch (Sr.)	5	Aaron Key (Sr.)
MLB	10	Tyquan King (Sr.)	6	Bryun Parham (Sr.)
WLB	9	Amir Renwick (Sr.)	32	Oumar Diomande (So.)
CB	2	Devin Pringle (Sr.)	25	Saxton Suchanic (Fr.)
CB	**13**	**CAM CHADWICK (SO.)**	0	Kobi Albert (So.)
NB	12	Chris Hudson (Jr.)	15	Kamo'i Latu (Sr.)
S	14	Tyrece Mills (Sr.)	**3**	**D'MON BRINSON (SR.)**
S	21	Lee Mollette III (Sr.)	7	Malachi Mclean (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	28	Chris Freeman (Sr.)	KR 7	Mel Brown (Sr.)
P	17	Connor Stutz (Sr.)	PR 19	Jackson Harper (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DAVID BUTLER II-IMAGN IMAGES

UCONN HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 85 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4

OFFENSE After a 2024 regular season that saw a program-record 415 points scored at the FBS level (31.9 per game), UConn returns a number of key offensive pieces for 2025. It starts at quarterback, where both Joe Fagnano and Nick Evers return after injuries caused them to share the starting role. Fagnano started in the Huskies' Fenway Bowl victory — their first bowl win since 2009 — but the competition was reignited after he obtained a waiver to return for his seventh year in college.

UConn was able to retain most of its receiving corps, including former Wisconsin transfer Skyler Bell, who registered a team-high 860 yards and five touchdowns on 50 catches. Running back Durrell Robinson departed for Auburn, but the group should remain strong after accumulating 2,590 rushing yards in 2024 — the second-highest total in program history. Cam Edwards returns after his 830-yard, eight-touchdown season, highlighting a group that includes MJ Flowers, Mel Brown and Victor Rosa.

The Huskies' offensive line excelled again in protecting the quarterback, allowing just 14 sacks in 2024, but it loses both starting tackles in Chase Lundt and Valentin Senn. Accumulated depth will be tested, as players like Kyle Juergens, Ben Murawski and Brady Wayburn have to step up.

DEFENSE Head coach Jim L. Mora's decision to bring in coordinator Matt Brock from Mississippi State proved fruitful, as the Huskies excelled in the new 3-3-5 scheme. But there was plenty of turnover — the Huskies lost their entire starting front seven to graduation and the transfer portal.

Senior linebacker Donovan Branch will be counted on to captain a unit that has plenty of unknowns, as UConn looks to replace its top four leading tacklers in linebackers Jayden McDonald and Tui Faumuina-Brown and safeties Malik Dixon-Williams and Rante Jones, who helped hold opponents to 347.3 yards and 23.1 points per game.

Expect the depth in the secondary to be a bright spot in 2025, led by cornerback Cam Chadwick, who had 47 total tackles and a pair of interceptions last season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Chris Freeman returns after making all 49 of his extra-point attempts and going 20-for-26 on field-goal attempts in '24, including a career-long 53-yarder. Connor Stutz also returns after punting for an average of 43.6 yards, landing 21 punts inside the 20-yard line.

FINAL ANALYSIS After UConn's first winning season in 14 years, the standard has been raised in Storrs, and Mora's group expects similar success with a manageable schedule in his fourth season at the helm. The Huskies went undefeated against Group of 5 programs in 2024 and have three opportunities for a Power 4 victory in 2025.

2024 RESULTS (9-4)

Aug. 31	at Maryland	L	7-50
Sept. 7	Merrimack	W	63-17
Sept. 14	at Duke	L	21-26
Sept. 21	Florida Atlantic	W	48-14
Sept. 28	Buffalo	W	47-3
Oct. 5	Temple	W	29-20
Oct. 19	Wake Forest	L	20-23
Oct. 26	Rice	W	17-10
Nov. 1	Georgia State	W	34-27
Nov. 9	at UAB	W	31-23
Nov. 23	at Syracuse	L	24-31
Nov. 30	at UMass	W	47-42
Dec. 28	vs. North Carolina #	W	27-14

#Fenway Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Central Conn. St.
Sept. 6	at Syracuse
Sept. 13	at Delaware
Sept. 20	Ball State
Sept. 27	at Buffalo
Oct. 4	FIU
Oct. 18	at Boston College
Oct. 25	at Rice
Nov. 1	UAB
Nov. 8	Duke
Nov. 15	Air Force
Nov. 22	at Florida Atlantic

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aubrey Melvin, DL	★★★
2.	Xavier Watson, TE	★★★
3.	Ksaan Farrar, QB	★★★
4.	Makih Johnson, WR	★★★
5.	Saxton Suchanic, CB	★★★
6.	Nykobi Brown, EDGE	★★★
7.	Axavier Bridges-Brooks, S	★★★
8.	Osiris Gilbert, CB	★★★
9.	Joe McGann, OT	★★★
10.	Lewenski Ydore, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jim L. Mora • Record at School: 18-20 (3 years)
Career Record: 64-50 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Gordon Sammis
Defensive Coordinator: Matt Brock • Location: Storrs, Conn.
Stadium: Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field (36,000)

MAC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	TOLEDO	ROCKETS
2	BUFFALO	BULLS
3	MIAMI (OHIO)	REDHAWKS
4	OHIO	BOBCATS
5	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	HUSKIES
6	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	CHIPPEWAS
7	BOWLING GREEN	FALCONS
8	WESTERN MICHIGAN	BRONCOS
9	EASTERN MICHIGAN	EAGLES
10	AKRON	ZIPS
11	BALL STATE	CARDINALS
12	UMASS	MINUTEMEN
13	KENT STATE	GOLDEN FLASHES

MAC CHAMPIONSHIP

TOLEDO OVER BUFFALO

ALL-MAC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	DEQUAN FINN	Miami (Ohio)
RB	AL-JAY HENDERSON	Buffalo
RB	CHIP TRAYANUM	Toledo
AP	JALEN BUCKLEY	Western Michigan
WR	JUNIOR VANDEROSS III	Toledo
WR	VICTOR SNOW	Buffalo
WR	TERRY LOCKETT JR.	Eastern Michigan
TE	BLAKE BOSMA	Western Michigan
C	ALEX PADGETT	Bowling Green
OL	TREVOR BROCK	Buffalo
OL	TYLER DOTY	Buffalo
OL	ETHAN SPOTH	Toledo
OL	MICKEY REWOLINSKI	Eastern Michigan

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	ROY WILLIAMS	Northern Illinois
DL	KOBE STEWART	Buffalo
DL	MICHAEL HELDMAN	Central Michigan
DL	GEORGE WOLO	Buffalo
LB	DAKOTA COCHRAN	Central Michigan
LB	RED MURDOCK	Buffalo
LB	JORDAN KWIATKOWSKI	Central Michigan
LB	DION CRAWFORD	Buffalo
CB	AVERY SMITH	Toledo
CB	TANK PEARSON	Ohio
S	DJ WALKER	Ohio
S	TATE HALLOCK	Western Michigan

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	DOM DZIOBAN	Miami (Ohio)
P	JOHN HENDERSON	Bowling Green
KR	QUA ASHLEY	Ball State
PR	BRYSON HAMMER	Toledo

BOWL PROJECTIONS

IS4S Salute to Veterans: Central Michigan vs. Arkansas State

Cure: Toledo vs. Tulane

Famous Idaho Potato: Ohio vs. Colorado State

GameAbove Sports: Buffalo vs. Rutgers

Arizona: Northern Illinois vs. San José State

Bahamas: Miami (Ohio) vs. Jacksonville State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BALL STATE
Offense: New: Mike Uremovich
Old: Jared Elliott

BOWLING GREEN
Offense: New: Travis Partridge
Old: Greg Nosal, Max Warner
Defense: New: Brandon Fisher
Old: Steve Morrison, Sammy Lawanson

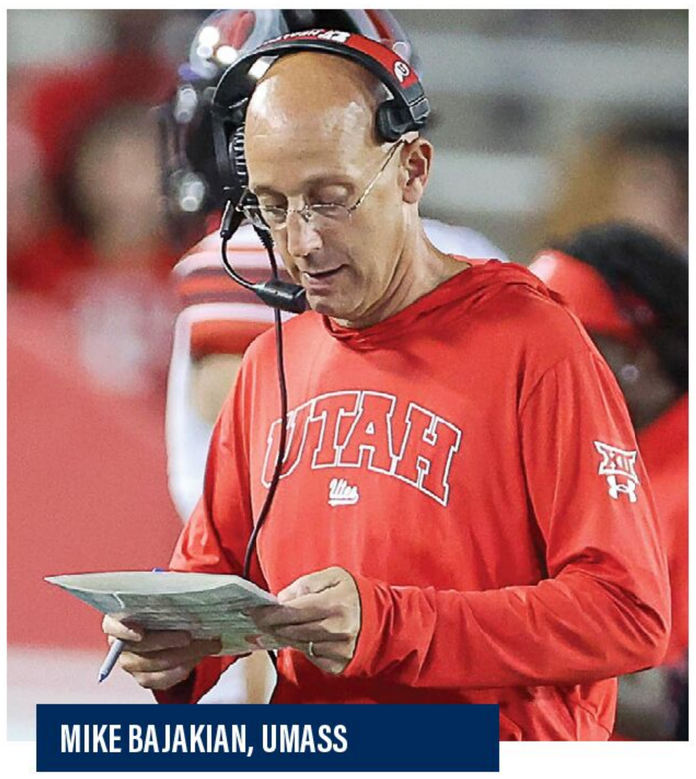
CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Jim Chapin, Derek Fulton
Old: Jim McElwain
Defense: New: Sean Cronin
Old: Robb Akey

NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Offense: New: Quinn Sanders
Old: Wesley Beschorner
Defense: New: Rob Harley
Old: Nick Benedetto

OHIO
Offense: New: Scott Isphording
Old: Scott Isphording, Allen Rudolph

UMASS
Offense: New: Mike Bajakian
Old: Shane Montgomery
Defense: New: Jared Keyte
Old: Keith Dudzinski

WESTERN MICHIGAN
Defense: New: Chris O'Leary
Old: Scott Power



MIKE BAJAKIAN, UMASS

DEQUAN FINN, MIAMI (OHIO)

JUNIOR VANDEROSS III, TOLEDO

FROM LEFT: TROY TAORMINA-IMAGN IMAGES; CHRIS JONES-USA TODAY SPORTS; MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Dequan Finn	QB	Miami (Ohio)	Baylor
	The dual-threat Finn is back in the MAC as one of the league's most experienced starters.			
2.	Chip Trayanum	RB	Toledo	Kentucky
	Now on to his fourth school, Trayanum figures to handle his heaviest workload yet.			
3.	Ta'Quan Roberson	QB	Buffalo	Kansas State
	The well-traveled Roberson gets another shot to start under center for the Bulls.			
4.	Drew Pyne	QB	Bowling Green	Missouri
	With FBS starting experience, Pyne headlines Eddie George's first transfer haul.			
5.	Sieh Bangura	RB	Ohio	Minnesota
	Bangura, a former 1,000-yard rusher and All-MAC back for the Bobcats, returns to Athens.			
6.	Trayvon Rudolph	WR	Toledo	Northern Illinois
	Rudolph's starting experience and special teams chops make him a valuable addition.			
7.	Jordan Nubin	RB	Kent State	Minnesota
	Nubin, a converted safety who once ran for 200 yards in a game, takes over the backfield.			
8.	Christian Leary	WR	Western Michigan	Georgia Tech
	Leary is a former blue-chip prospect who could become the Broncos' go-to receiver.			
9.	Deion Colzie	WR	Miami (Ohio)	Notre Dame
	Colzie brings experience to the RedHawks' revamped receiver room.			
10.	Noah Kim	QB	Eastern Michigan	Coastal Carolina
	Kim, who started at Michigan State in 2023, is the Eagles' latest addition under center.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Toledo (78)
2. Miami (Ohio) (85)
3. Northern Illinois (87)
4. Bowling Green (89)
5. Eastern Michigan (94)
6. Kent State (99)
7. Buffalo (103)
8. Western Michigan (107)
9. Ball State (117)
10. Ohio (127)
11. Central Michigan (128)
12. Akron (130)
13. UMass (137)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 30 Toledo at Kentucky
Sept. 27 E. Michigan at C. Michigan
Oct. 11 Toledo at Bowling Green
Oct. 25 Northern Illinois at Ball State
Nov. 1 C. Michigan at W. Michigan
Nov. 4 Miami (Ohio) at Ohio
Nov. 11 Kent State at Akron
Nov. 12 Toledo at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 19 Miami (Ohio) at Buffalo
Nov. 25 W. Michigan at E. Michigan
Nov. 28 Ohio at Buffalo
Nov. 29 Toledo at Central Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	James Finley	S	Northern Illinois	★★★	610
2.	Kamren Flowers	WR	Toledo	★★★	666
3.	Donmiel Rogers	CB	Eastern Michigan	★★★	884
4.	DeShaun Lanier	WR	Bowling Green	★★★	954
5.	Caleb Haack	TE	Northern Illinois	★★★	1,020
6.	Adrian Walker Jr.	ATH	Miami (Ohio)	★★★	1,104
7.	Omar Mims	WR	Toledo	★★★	1,130
8.	Aveion Chenault	WR	Western Michigan	★★★	1,196
9.	Jonathan Carter	S	Eastern Michigan	★★★	1,201
10.	Shawn Simeon	RB	Toledo	★★★	1,251

Rankings per On3 industry ranking

AKRON ZIPS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 126 | MAC PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Ben Finley was a full-time starter for the first time in his career last season and completed 55% of his passes for 2,604 yards with 16 touchdowns. He is the steadying force on an offense with a lot of turnover, and he should be in for a solid final campaign.

Jordan Gant comes in from FCS Tennessee State and is in line to be the top running back. FCS Colgate transfer Chris Gee was a rotational player for two seasons and projects to get carries, and freshman Sean Patrick is another running back to watch.

Wide receiver Alex Adams is back, and the Zips are hoping he regains his first-team All-MAC form from 2022. Adams missed all of 2024 due to a lower-body injury but is healthy and had a promising spring. The tight end position produced 48 catches and 401 yards last season, and both regulars return in Jake Newell and Conner Cravaack.

The offensive line struggled last season, but two starters are back to lend some experience. Keylen Davis started 11 games at guard, while center Delvin Morris started the back half of the year. Junior Maasai King had a huge spring and won the job at right tackle.

DEFENSE The defense must be rebuilt at all three levels. In the secondary, Catrell White will start at one corner, while newcomer Ben Kamara won the job opposite White, beating out last year's starter Elijah Reed. Former Washington State transfer Justin Anderson had seven starts at safety and is a sure tackler. Freshman Rodrick Hunter is a safety to watch.

At linebacker, big things are expected out of Gage Summers, who had 19 tackles against Toledo last season. Melvin Spriggs and Shammond Cooper, who both earned time as reserves last season, will join him.

Bruno Dall, a redshirt freshman defensive end from Germany, had a breakout spring and will be ready for a bigger role. Cyrus Durham arrives from Arizona and should start opposite Dall, giving Akron some solid bookends. Freshmen Elijah Davis and Ronald Hull are slated to start on the interior, but the staff was looking for reinforcements in the portal.

SPECIALISTS Owen Wiley was in charge of both punting and kicking at the end of spring, but the staff was looking to give him some help before fall camp. Wiley redshirted in 2024 but hit 4-of-6 field goals in 2023 in limited action for the Zips.

FINAL ANALYSIS Akron head coach Joe Moorhead carries an 8-28 record into his fourth season, so pressure is mounting for the program to show progress. For that to happen, Finley will need to have his best season, the defensive line will need to mature quickly and the offensive line will need to improve greatly. A winning season does not look to be in the cards.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MAC)

Aug. 31	at Ohio State	L	6-52
Sept. 7	at Rutgers	L	17-49
Sept. 14	Colgate	W	31-20
Sept. 21	at South Carolina	L	7-50
Sept. 28	at Ohio	L	10-30
Oct. 5	Bowling Green	L	20-27
Oct. 12	at Western Michigan	L	24-34
Oct. 26	Eastern Michigan	W	25-21
Nov. 2	Buffalo	L	30-41
Nov. 13	at Northern Illinois	L	16-29
Nov. 19	at Kent State	W	38-17
Nov. 26	Toledo (ot)	W	21-14

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Wyoming
Sept. 6	at Nebraska
Sept. 13	at UAB
Sept. 20	Duquesne
Sept. 27	at Toledo
Oct. 4	Central Michigan
Oct. 11	Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 18	at Ball State
Oct. 25	at Buffalo
Nov. 4	UMass
Nov. 11	Kent State
Nov. 18	at Bowling Green

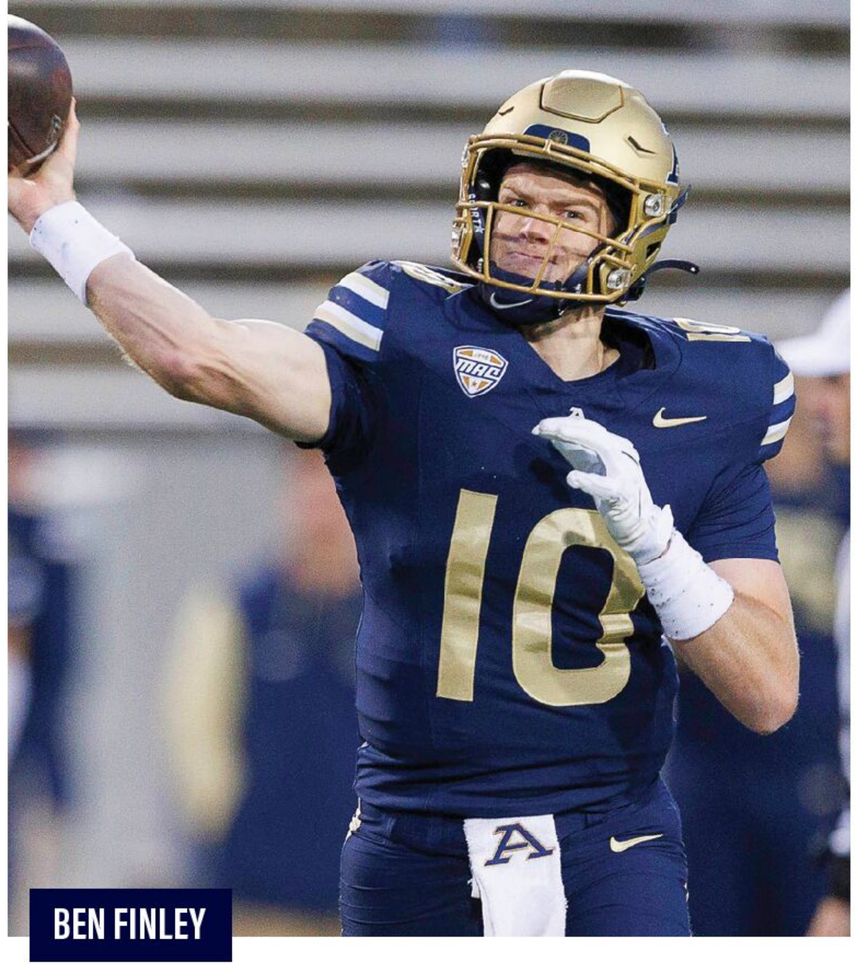
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ty Watkins, EDGE	★★★
2.	Devin Reeves, LB	★★★
3.	Luke Sivon, WR	★★★
4.	Kenneth McManus IV, IOL	★★★
5.	Tairan Davis Jr., S	★★★
6.	Jon Gould, OT	★★★
7.	Vann Kavals, EDGE	★★★
8.	Gavin James, LB	★★★
9.	Jaiden Brown-Demery, IOL	★★★
10.	Cibastian Broughton, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joe Moorhead • Record at School: 8-28 (3 years) • Career Record: 60-53 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Moorhead • Defensive Coordinator: Tim Tibesar • Location: Akron, Ohio • Stadium: InfoCision Stadium–Summa Field (30,000)



BEN FINLEY

SCOUTING THE ZIPS

"Every time it looks like Joe [Moorhead] has something going with that offense, they're losing guys. Moorhead has a ton of respect across the industry and could be calling an offense for a major program. The issue isn't coaching — it's just a numbers game. The program is bare; they play as many paycheck games as they can take, and they don't have enough support to bring in portal talent with NIL, at least not enough to make a difference for the guys they lose. ... I don't know how much longer Moorhead will stick around. Right now, if the system doesn't work for a guy who coached winning SEC programs to get above .500 in this league, something has to change."

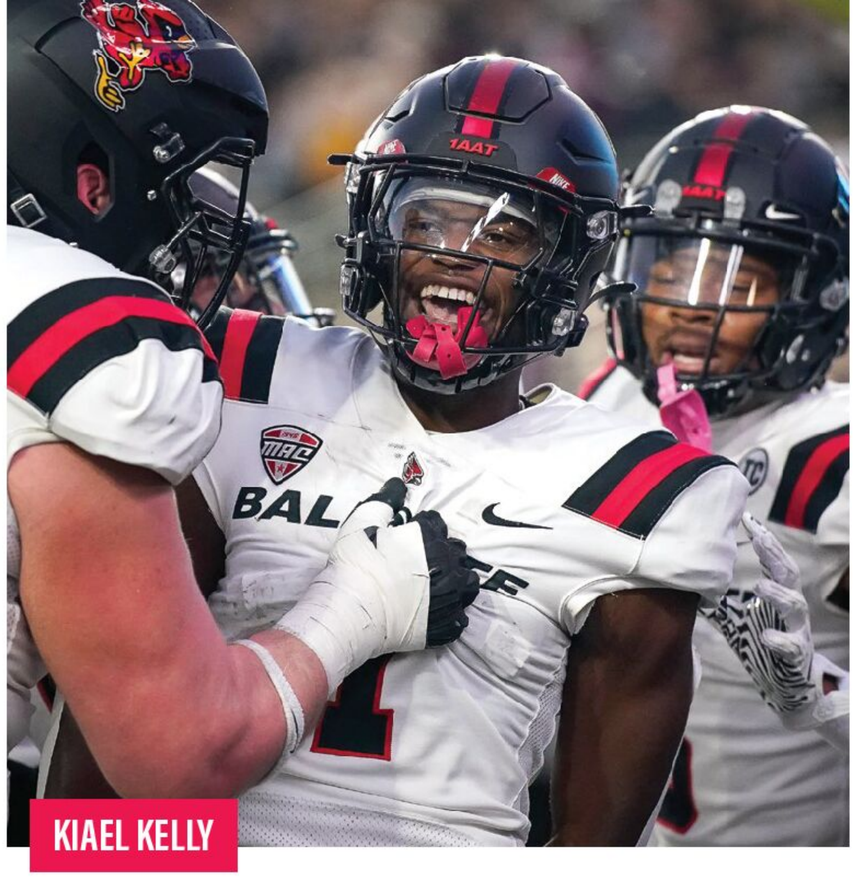
— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	7	Alex Adams (Jr.)	8	Brandon Hills (So.)
WR	8	Kyan Mason (Fr.)	**5**	**ISRAEL POLK (SO.)**
WR	16	Paul Davis (So.)	83	Khalil Witherspoon (Fr.)
LT	78	Darrell Johnson Jr. (Jr.)	60	Jeremiah Ndaiga (Fr.)
LG	**56**	**KEYLEN DAVIS (SO.)**	55	Amarie Archer (Fr.)
C	**57**	**DELVIN MORRIS (SO.)**	62	Max Mobley (Fr.)
RG	50	Allen Jones Jr. (Jr.)	63	Roosevelt Mitchell (Fr.)
RT	51	Maasai King (Jr.)	73	Jonas Mann (So.)
TE	**88**	**JAKE NEWELL (SO.)**	85	Conner Cravaack (So.)
QB	**15**	**BEN FINLEY (JR.)**	6	Brayden Roggow (Fr.)
RB	22	Jordan Gant (Jr.)	25	Chris Gee (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	41	Bruno Dall (Fr.)	16	Dahvon Frazier (Fr.)
DT	57	Elijah Davis (Fr.)	97	Jon'Trell Mixon (Fr.)
DT	55	Ronald Hull (Fr.)	90	Dimitri Madden (Jr.)
DE	10	Cyrus Durham (So.)	50	Jahvon Frazier (Fr.)
SLB	**7**	**SHAMMOND COOPER (SR.)**	41	Bruno Dall (Fr.)
LB	32	Gage Summers (Jr.)	25	Jason Hocker (Fr.)
LB	42	Melvin Spriggs (Fr.)	7	Shammond Cooper (Sr.)
CB	14	Ben Kamara (Jr.)	**11**	**ELIJAH REED (SO.)**
CB	21	Catrell White (Fr.)	12	Iesa Jarmon (Jr.)
S	13	Rodrick Hunter (Fr.)	6	Jamari Somerville (Fr.)
S	**4**	**JUSTIN ANDERSON (JR.)**	26	Aman Greenwood (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	99	Owen Wiley (So.)	KR	16	Paul Davis (So.)
P	99	Owen Wiley (So.)	PR	16	Paul Davis (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NICHOLAS MCLAUGHLIN



KIAEL KELLY

ANDREW NELLES / THE TENNESSEAN

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"[Mike] Uremovich is another FCS guy who's put together rebuilds, but it's not a risky hire. His Indiana roots help him a lot here, and he knows the program and the league. I think they wanted to keep a local connection after they decided to move on from [Mike] Neu. ... They're basically an unknown. I don't think they'll have but two or three starters on the entire team come back and play in the new systems. ... One of those guys is the quarterback, [Kiael] Kelly. The previous staff moved him around to a lot of different positions, so if you're looking for something promising, if this offensive staff can get the most out of his athleticism, that's a really good sign. ... They're a blank slate, and it could take some time here, but the school will be patient with the new staff."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	10	Jamarion McDougle (So.)	17	Trey Firestone (So.)
WR	2	Ty Robinson (Sr.)	11	Isaiah Thacker (So.)
WR	5	Qian Magwood (Sr.)	3	Eric Weatherly (Jr.)
LT	**66**	**CHRIS HOOD (JR.)**	71	Brady Barrowman (Fr.)
LG	75	Zach Bandy (Fr.)	61	Luke Dalton (Jr.)
C	73	Cole Mosier (Jr.)	56	Isaac Lucas (So.)
RG	56	Isaac Lucas (So.)	76	CJ Zeltwanger (Fr.)
RT	70	Tristan Cook (Fr.)	72	Cody Smith (So.)
TE	85	Kameron Anthony (Fr.)	41	Drew Cassens
QB	1	Kiael Kelly (Sr.)	7	Walter Taylor III (Jr.)
RB	9	Qua Ashley (Jr.)	20	TJ Horton (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	44	Nathan Voorhis (Sr.)	36	Micah Wing (Jr.)
DT	**47**	**DREW HUGHES (SR.)**	41	Ben Marsh (So.)
DT	33	Darin Conley (So.)	93	Scott Hudson (Sr.)
DE	31	DeJuan Echoles Jr. (Jr.)	48	Sam Feeney (So.)
LB	7	Ashton Whitner (Jr.)	29	Micah Lillard (Fr.)
MLB	**21**	**JOEY STEMLER (SR.)**	6	Caden Johnson (Jr.)
LB	22	Jack Beebe (Sr.)	26	Alfred Chea (Sr.)
CB	20	Willizhuan Yates (So.)	10	Jahmad Harmon (So.)
CB	15	Eric McClain (So.)	5	Roman Pearson (Jr.)
S	19	Deondre Shepherd (Fr.)	34	Derek "DJ" Fields (So.)
S	2	Michael Gravely Jr. (Sr.)	8	Avery Stuart (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Carson Holmer (Jr.)	KR	9 Qua Ashley (Jr.)
P	38	Brody Boehm (Fr.)	PR	5 Qian Magwood (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BALL STATE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 134 | MAC PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 MAC

OFFENSE Kiael Kelly is poised to take the reins of what should be a run-oriented offense for new head coach Mike Uremovich, who arrives from FCS Butler. Kelly started the latter half of 2023 as a run-first QB, totaling 724 rushing yards and seven TDs while completing only 53% of his throws. He was moved to running back and receiver last year when Kadin Semonza took over, but Semonza has moved on to Tulane. Walter Taylor III is another run-first QB who could see some time.

Qua Ashley arrives from Kennesaw State as the top running back. TJ Horton had 23 carries as a reserve for the Cardinals last season, and Purdue transfer Elijah Jackson should also figure prominently.

Slot receiver Qian Magwood was second on the team in touchdown catches with four. Ty Robinson has been unable to fulfill expectations since transferring from Colorado after injuries have basically robbed him of his first two years at Ball State. He is healthy and could have a big season. Eric Weatherly and Jamarion McDougle will be key pieces of the passing offense. Tight end Kameron Anthony will also be counted on.

The offensive line will be led by center Cole Mosier, an athletic lineman, as well as returning starter Chris Hood at left tackle.

DEFENSE Drew Hughes is the lone returning starter on the defensive front and had 22 tackles last season. Darin Conley, a rotational player a year ago at defensive tackle, and FCS Bryant transfer Nathan Voorhis will likely start at defensive end, but there is not a lot of depth.

Joey Stemler will be a team captain and leader at middle linebacker. Ashton Whitner is another LB starter, and Jack Beebe, a part-time starter last season, and UConn transfer Alfred Chea will battle for the other spot.

There are a lot of transfers arriving in the secondary, but two experienced corners return. Eric McClain started as a true freshman, and Willizhuan Yates had an interception and a forced fumble last season. There are reinforcements at safety: Deondre Shepherd (Coastal Carolina), Michael Gravely Jr. (Western Michigan) and Avery Stuart (Kentucky).

SPECIALISTS Carlson Holmer, a redshirt junior, will take over kicking duties from Jackson Courville, who left after spring ball. Holmer was 2-for-2 on field goals and 5-for-5 on extra points in a reserve role in 2024. Missouri transfer Brody Boehm could be set to punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS It will be interesting to see if Ball State can lean into the run or if Kelly will improve as a passer enough to open up the vertical game. Defensively, Ball State must improve everywhere, and there are plenty of transfers who will have a chance to help right away. A bowl game might be a lot to ask in Year 1 for Uremovich.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 MAC)

Sept. 7	Missouri State	W	42-34
Sept. 14	at Miami (Fla.)	L	0-62
Sept. 21	at Central Michigan	L	34-37
Sept. 28	at James Madison	L	7-63
Oct. 5	Western Michigan	L	42-45
Oct. 12	at Kent State	W	37-35
Oct. 19	at Vanderbilt	L	14-24
Oct. 26	Northern Illinois	W	25-23
Nov. 5	Miami (Ohio)	L	21-27
Nov. 12	at Buffalo (ot)	L	48-51
Nov. 23	Bowling Green	L	13-38
Nov. 29	at Ohio	L	21-42

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Purdue
Sept. 6	at Auburn
Sept. 13	New Hampshire
Sept. 20	at UConn
Oct. 4	Ohio
Oct. 11	at W. Michigan
Oct. 18	Akron
Oct. 25	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 5	Kent State
Nov. 15	Eastern Michigan
Nov. 22	at Toledo
Nov. 29	at Miami (Ohio)

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jamar Birden, EDGE	★★★
2.	Michael Thacker, DL	★★★
3.	Derion Talbert, WR	★★★
4.	Lucas Szymborski, LB	★★★
5.	Mikeah Webster, LB	★★★
6.	Sam Spicer, OT	★★★
7.	Donovan Lanier, CB	★★★
8.	Kamron Chamble, S	★★★
9.	Jalen Bonds, RB	★★★
10.	Khalel Wright, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Uremovich • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 56-56 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Craig Harmon • Defensive Coordinator: Jeff Knowles • Location: Muncie, Ind. • Stadium: Scheumann Stadium (22,500)

BOWLING GREEN FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 118 | MAC PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE College Football Hall of Famer and Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George takes over at Bowling Green after Scot Loeffler was hired by the Philadelphia Eagles as quarterbacks coach. Well-traveled Drew Pyne will be George's first QB1 in the MAC after stops at Notre Dame, Arizona State and Missouri. Pyne's most productive season came in 2022 when he started 10 games at Notre Dame and threw 22 TDs with six INTs as the Fighting Irish went 8-2 in his starts.

At running back, Chris McMillian, Chris Edmonds and PaSean Wimberly are the early front-runners. Wimberly was a team captain last year, but a spring non-contact injury cost him the season. McMillian is a junior-college transfer who had a strong spring.

The wide receiving corps has some veterans, including Finn Hogan (17 rec., 176 yds.). RJ Garcia II is a transfer from Kansas State who missed 2024 due to injury and has high expectations.

The biggest shoes to fill, of course, are at tight end, where Harold Fannin Jr. is off to the NFL after his remarkable 1,555-yard season. Florida transfer Arlis Boardingham has a chance to minimize the dropoff.

Four starters return up front. The left and right tackle spots are in good hands with Tunde Fatukasi and Nate Pabst.

DEFENSE The Falcons looked to the portal for some reinforcements up front, and one came in the form of Eriq George, Eddie's son, who was second-team All-OVC last season at FCS Tennessee State. He joins Myles Bradley, a rotational player who is ready to step up. Tackle Evan Branch-Haynes saw extensive action last year and will be counted on. Another transfer to watch will be linebacker Gideon Lampron, who was an FCS All-American at Dayton last season.

The secondary should be solid, with Darius Lorfils returning at safety. Transfer corner JoJo Johnson (Indiana) impressed in the spring, and the coaches were also high on nickel Kal-El Pascal, who forced his way onto the field as a true freshman.

SPECIALISTS Punter John Henderson was second-team All-MAC last year after averaging 40.8 yards per punt. At placekicker, Zach Long took over when Jackson Kleather was injured last season. Long was 13-of-19 on field goals and Kleather 6-of-9, so that battle figures to continue.

FINAL ANALYSIS George has high expectations for his first Bowling Green team, but he has yet to have his presumed starting QB on campus. The offensive line will be a strength, and the secondary should pace the defense. A MAC title game appearance may be too lofty, but the Falcons should once again finish above .500 in the conference, as they have the past three years.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 29	Fordham	W	41-17
Sept. 7	at Penn State	L	27-34
Sept. 21	at Texas A&M	L	20-26
Sept. 28	Old Dominion	L	27-30
Oct. 5	at Akron	W	27-20
Oct. 12	Northern Illinois	L	7-17
Oct. 19	Kent State	W	27-6
Oct. 26	at Toledo	W	41-26
Nov. 5	at Central Michigan	W	23-13
Nov. 12	Western Michigan	W	31-13
Nov. 23	at Ball State	W	38-13
Nov. 29	Miami (Ohio)	L	12-28
Dec. 26	vs. Arkansas State #	L	31-38

#68 Ventures Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Lafayette
Sept. 6	at Cincinnati
Sept. 13	Liberty
Sept. 20	at Louisville
Sept. 27	at Ohio
Oct. 11	Toledo
Oct. 18	Central Michigan
Oct. 25	at Kent State
Nov. 1	Buffalo
Nov. 8	at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 18	Akron
Nov. 25	at UMass

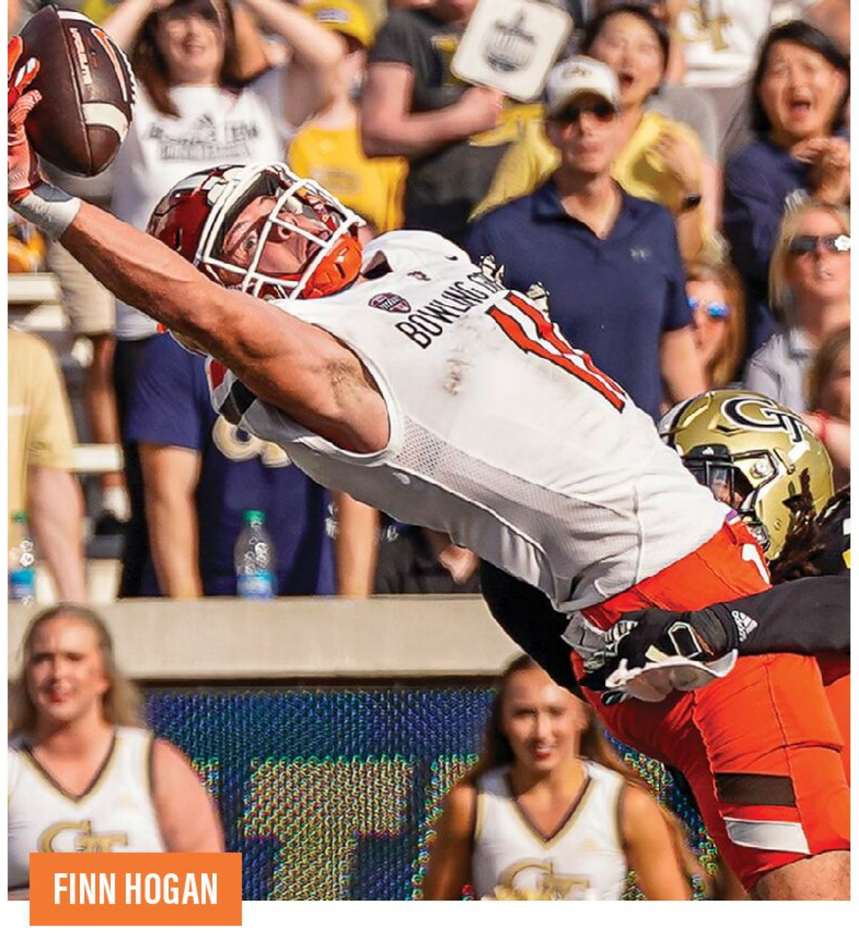
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aiden Brewer, TE	★★★
2.	DeShaun Lanier, WR	★★★
3.	Dilon Tallie, WR	★★★
4.	Jeremiah Scoby, TE	★★★
5.	Masyn Zahursky, IOL	★★★
6.	Preston EstoEsta, S	★★★
7.	Brendon Rice, DL	★★★
8.	Ethan Kraatz, IOL	★★★
9.	Quentin Lewis, EDGE	★★★
10.	JT Kitna, QB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eddie George • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 24-22 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Travis Partridge
Defensive Coordinator: Brandon Fisher • Location: Bowling Green, Ohio
Stadium: Doyt L. Perry Stadium (33,527)



FINN HOGAN

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"It's unfortunate that [Scot] Loeffler left when he did, but there's talent on this roster, and this new staff did some impressive work turning around Tennessee State in the FCS. ... Drew Pyne is a great get for them. I think they can get similar results as [Connor] Bazelak, and he can play two seasons, so they can recruit some talent around him. ... Eddie [George] could be a tremendous hire here. He's got instant credibility recruiting the state and the region, and he can lean on Ohio State connections. This league used to catch rising stars on their way up, and if Eddie can push these guys to one breakout season, someone will scoop him up. The league needs to show young coaches this is still a cradle of coaches, so maybe Eddie can help turn that perception around."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	11	Finn Hogan (Sr.)	17	Trey Johnson (Jr.)
WR	2	RJ Garcia II (Sr.)	18	Winn Sharp (So.)
WR	1	Allen Middleton (So.)	5	Brennan Ridley (So.)
LT	55	**TUNDE FATUKASI (SR.)**	70	Alex Harris (Fr.)
LG	69	Andrew Kilfoyl (Sr.)	72	Cade Zimmerly (Sr.)
C	57	**ALEX PADGETT (SR.)**	54	Brody Bolyn (So.)
RG	65	**JAKE BURNS (SR.)**	71	Rico Steele (Fr.)
RT	75	**NATE PABST (SR.)**	77	James Thomas Jr. (So.)
TE		Arlis Boardingham (Jr.)	7	Jyrin Johnson (Sr.)
QB		Drew Pyne (Sr.)	3	Lucian Anderson III (So.)
RB	4	Chris McMillian (Jr.)	23	Chris Edmonds (So.)

DEFENSE (0)

DE	11	Collins Acheampong (So.)	45	Bam Booker (Jr.)
NT	57	Dayln White (So.)	97	Darius Gaddy (Sr.)
DT	55	Evan Branch-Haynes (Sr.)	98	Malik Moses (Fr.)
EDGE		Eriq George (Jr.)	23	Myles Bradley (Jr.)
MLB	10	Donny Stephens (Sr.)	30	Dorian Pringle (Fr.)
WLB	4	Gideon Lampron (Jr.)	42	Chris Williams (Sr.)
CB	2	JoJo Johnson (Sr.)	28	Victor Vazquez (Sr.)
CB	12	Mayes Doggan (Sr.)	25	Jace Henry (So.)
NB	22	Kal-El Pascal (So.)	28	Victor Vazquez (Sr.)
SS	9	Darius Lorfils (Sr.)	8	Jay'Quan Bostic (Fr.)
FS	31	D'kyah Banks (Fr.)	8	Jay'Quan Bostic (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Zach Long (Sr.)	KR	16	Rahkeem Smith (Sr.)
P	19	John Henderson (Sr.)	PR	20	Justin Pegues (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DALE ZANINE-USA TODAY SPORTS

RED MURDOCK

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"If they can manage a decent offense, they're a conference title contender. ... Pete [Lembo] wasn't a sexy hire, but he knows how to win in this league, knows how to manage a program, and he took a good roster and won big games with them. They got better later in the season. That's an easy way to find good program management. ... The defense is one of the best in the league, and they stayed intact. I can't think of a team that had more success keeping guys from the portal, and then they added a couple really nice pieces from the P4 schools. They looked like the best defense in the league coming out of spring. ... The biggest question is can they replace CJ [Ogbonna] at quarterback. They don't need a world-beater out there because the defense is the strength here."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	**NIK MCMILLAN (JR.)**	84	Tyrell Simmons Jr. (Fr.)
WR	0	**VICTOR SNOW (JR.)**	21	Patrick Clacks III (Fr.)
WR	1	Qua Sanders (Sr.)	6	Chance Morrow (Jr.)
LT	59	Gabriel Arena (So.)	75	Ahmaan Thomas (Fr.)
LG	79	**TREVOR BROCK (SR.)**	71	Matt Pajuste (Sr.)
C	52	Jake Timm (Sr.)	67	Alex Heininger (Jr.)
RG	78	**TYLER DOTY (SR.)**	58	Matthew Glen (Jr.)
RT	73	**HENRY TABANSI (SO.)**	61	Tyrone Davis (Fr.)
TE	14	Evan King (Sr.)	88	Ryan Daly (Jr.)
QB	2	Ta'Quan Roberson (Sr.)	9	Gunnar Gray (Sr.)
RB	5	**AL-JAY HENDERSON (SR.)**	32	Lamar Sperling (So.)

DEFENSE (10)

DE	0	**KOBE STEWART (SR.)**	30	Jacari Bennett (Fr.)
DT	90	**GEORGE WOLO (SR.)**	99	**CORNELL EVANS (JR.)**
DT	55	**TRISTAN SOUZA (SR.)**	91	Devin Morgan (Jr.)
DE	12	Malin White (Sr.)	80	Shamar Riser-Pressley (Fr.)
LB	2	**RED MURDOCK (SR.)**	33	Connor Henderson (Sr.)
LB	18	**DION CRAWFORD (JR.)**	39	Mitchell Gonser (Sr.)
CB	28	**MARQUIS COOPER (SR.)**	21	Eddie Pleasant III (So.)
CB	5	**CHARLES MCCARTHERENS (JR.)**	3	Oliver Bridges (Jr.)
NB	8	**JALEN MCNAIR (SR.)**	15	SaVeon Brown (Jr.)
SS	4	Jonathan Capo (Sr.)	16	John Keough (So.)
FS	7	**SOLOMON BROWN (SR.)**	6	Miles Greer (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Nick Reed (So.)	KR	25 Terrance Shelton Jr. (So.)
P	42	Dylan Drennan (Fr.)	PR	0 Victor Snow (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DENNY MEDLEY-IMAGN IMAGES

BUFFALO BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 79 | MAC PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE The Bulls return two third-team All-MAC skill position players, but there will be a new quarterback getting them the ball. Ta'Quan Roberson, who started one season at UConn between backup stints at Penn State and Kansas State, looked like the man for the job during the spring. He completed 58% of his passes with 12 TDs in his starting season.

At running back, Al-Jay Henderson returns after piling up 1,078 yards and nine touchdowns in his breakout season. He will be the No. 1 back again and has a chance to lead the MAC in yards from scrimmage (he was fifth in 2024). Lamar Sperling will serve as Henderson's backup.

Wideout Victor Snow played last season as a walk-on and ended up third-team All-MAC (and was awarded a scholarship). Snow is the fastest player on the team. Nik McMillan was the projected WR1 last season but tore his ACL in Week 2. He is set to return.

Three starters are back on the offensive line, including two third-team All-MAC selections. Guards Tyler Doty and Trevor Brock were honored after leading a line that was fourth in the MAC in rushing and in sacks allowed per game. Right tackle Henry Tabansi also returns.

DEFENSE The Bulls defense returns 10 starters, including linebacker Red Murdock, who finished second in the nation in tackles with 156 behind his teammate, MAC Defensive Player of the Year Shaun Dolac. Murdock had 16.5 tackles for a loss and seven forced fumbles and is in position to give the Bulls their second straight MAC DPOY. Alongside him at linebacker will be Dion Crawford, a plus athlete who was third-team All-MAC. The defensive line is deep, with MAC sacks leader Kobe Stewart back at defensive end, plus a deep rotation at defensive tackle led by George Wolo and Tristan Souza.

In the secondary, four starters are back from a unit that needs to improve. Marquis Cooper and Charles McCartherens are back at the corners, and sixth-year DB Jalen McNair will start again at nickel. At free safety, Solomon Brown is back after finishing third on the team in tackles.

SPECIALISTS Buffalo lost third-team All-MAC honorees at both punter and kicker, and the Bulls may look to add competition at both positions in the transfer portal after exiting the spring with Nick Reed at kicker and walk-on Dylan Drennan at punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS After finishing 6-2 in the MAC in Pete Lembo's first season, the Bulls have a good shot at reaching the MAC Championship Game for the first time since 2020. Many of the all-conference honorees from last year are back, and there is experience on both sides of the ball. If Roberson can thrive at QB, expect Buffalo to be in contention all season.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 29	Lafayette	W	30-13
Sept. 7	at Missouri	L	0-38
Sept. 14	UMass	W	34-3
Sept. 21	at Northern Illinois (ot)	W	23-20
Sept. 28	at UConn	L	3-47
Oct. 12	Toledo	W	30-15
Oct. 19	Western Michigan	L	41-48
Oct. 26	at Ohio	L	16-47
Nov. 2	at Akron	W	41-30
Nov. 12	Ball State (ot)	W	51-48
Nov. 20	at Eastern Michigan	W	37-20
Nov. 26	Kent State	W	43-7
Jan. 4	vs. Liberty #	W	26-7

#Bahamas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at Minnesota
Sept. 6	St. Francis (Pa.)
Sept. 13	at Kent State
Sept. 20	Troy
Sept. 27	UConn
Oct. 4	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 18	at UMass
Oct. 25	Akron
Nov. 1	at Bowling Green
Nov. 12	at Central Michigan
Nov. 19	Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 28	Ohio

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alvin Jones III, WR	★★★
2.	Dwayne Early, WR	★★★
3.	Phillip Folmar, WR	★★★
4.	Jason Wright, QB	★★★
5.	Caleb Watts, OT	★★★
6.	Jackson Davenport, OT	★★★
7.	George Hill, LB	★★★
8.	Bradley Ilunga-Bisselele, LB	★★★
9.	Thomas Barr, IOL	★★★
10.	Christopher Climes, DL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pete Lembo • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year) • Career Record: 121-69 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dave Patenaude • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Bowen • Location: Buffalo, N.Y. • Stadium: UB Stadium (25,013)

CENTRAL MICHIGAN CHIPPEWAS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 117 | MAC PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Joe Labas is back after missing half of last season due to an arm injury, one of a number of injuries that plagued the Chippewas in 2024. He completed 59% of his passes with seven touchdowns and seven interceptions in his first season since transferring from Iowa.

Nahree Biggins and Tulane transfer Trey Cornist will be the main two running backs, with freshman Jakivion Calip also earning some looks in the spring. Biggins, a converted defensive back, has breakaway speed.

The wide receivers hope to stay healthy this season. Tyson Davis missed all of 2024 due to injury after leading the team with 444 receiving yards and four touchdowns in 2023, and Langston Lewis has missed most of the past two seasons with injuries. Former Wisconsin transfer Tommy McIntosh is another to watch. Tight ends DeCorion Temple and Nathan VanTimmeren both saw extensive action in 2024.

The offensive line has only one starter returning in right guard Brady Ploucha. Martin Koivisto will likely be in the lineup at the other guard spot, and sophomore right tackle Jacob Russell had a strong spring.

DEFENSE The back seven should be very solid for CMU. Middle linebacker Jordan Kwiatkowski led the team with 96 tackles and was second-team All-MAC. He will lead a linebacking corps that returns plenty of experience. Dakota Cochran and Lawai'a Brown were both playmakers a year ago and will give CMU a solid foundation in the middle.

Three starters return in the secondary, plus a fourth — Kalen Carroll — who was a two-year starter at Cincinnati. Safeties Caleb Spann and Elijah Rikard were second and fourth on the team in tackles, respectively, last season. Jaion Jackson started all 12 games as a true freshman at corner, one of only five in the nation to do that. Nickel Brenden Deasfernandes also saw action in all 12 games.

Up front, defensive end Michael Heldman is an all-league candidate after racking up eight QB hurries last season. Kade Kostus started at the other end, and Fernando Sanchez III is a hybrid linebacker/defensive end.

SPECIALISTS Cade Graham handled kickoffs in 2024 and was the first-string kicker in the spring. Punter Declan Duley is a transfer from Illinois. The speedy Biggins will likely handle kick returns again.

FINAL ANALYSIS Central Michigan's defense should be able to keep it in most games as the offense gets its feet underneath it. The schedule is tough right out of the gate. First-year head coach Matt Drinkall, the offensive line coach at Army in 2024, has a lot of moving pieces, but there are newcomers who are potential difference-makers. A bowl game, however, may be out of reach for 2025.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 MAC)

Aug. 29	Central Conn. St.	W	66-10
Sept. 7	at FIU	L	14-52
Sept. 14	at Illinois	L	9-30
Sept. 21	Ball State	W	37-34
Sept. 28	San Diego State	W	22-21
Oct. 12	Ohio	L	25-27
Oct. 19	at Eastern Michigan	L	34-38
Oct. 26	at Miami (Ohio)	L	7-56
Nov. 5	Bowling Green	L	13-23
Nov. 12	at Toledo	L	10-37
Nov. 19	Western Michigan	W	16-14
Nov. 30	at Northern Illinois	L	16-24

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at San José State
Sept. 6	at Pitt
Sept. 13	at Michigan
Sept. 20	Wagner
Sept. 27	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 4	at Akron
Oct. 18	at Bowling Green
Oct. 25	UMass
Nov. 1	at W. Michigan
Nov. 12	Buffalo
Nov. 19	at Kent State
Nov. 29	Toledo

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Triston Pierre, IOL	★★★
2.	Jeremiah McKenzie, LB	★★★
3.	Mason Mudd, DL	★★★
4.	Braylen Naves, WR	★★★
5.	Jayel Harris, RB	★★★
6.	Andre Thomas Jr., LB	★★★
7.	Nolan Anderson, S	★★★
8.	Max Macklem, CB	★★★
9.	Talon Smith, IOL	★★★
10.	Lawrence Wells II, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Drinkall • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 42-17 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Jim Chapin
Defensive Coordinator: Sean Cronin • Location: Mount Pleasant, Mich. • Stadium: Kelly/Shorts Stadium (35,127)

JOE LABAS

SCOUTING THE CHIPPEWAS

"These guys are probably the best 'new head coach' program in our league. The defense [Matt] Drinkall inherited is very solid, and they've done a pretty good job keeping most of those guys from jumping in the portal. ... They're going to be a run-heavy team coming from Army, which should help out the defense even more. ... Expect them to be run-heavy and creative with it, probably more than you can be at a service academy. CMU is a top-end program in this league and invests in football, and they can pull in top guys. They're selling physicality in recruiting, and Mac [Jim McElwain] left them some good pieces. Drinkall is going to bring some juice, and they haven't seen that in a long time."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	82	Tommy McIntosh (Jr.)	16	Nasir Williams (Fr.)
WR	20	Langston Lewis (Jr.)	80	Justin Ruffin Jr. (Fr.)
WR	19	Tyson Davis (Jr.)	11	Josiah Booker (Fr.)
LT	73	Dasan Smith (Fr.)	71	Luis Martinez (Sr.)
LG	76	Martin Koivisto (Jr.)	60	John Iannuzzi (Sr.)
C	55	Ryan Blum (So.)	58	Apisa Poumele (Jr.)
RG	**59**	**BRADY PLOUCHA (JR.)**	69	Jacob Booth (So.)
RT	70	Jacob Russell (So.)	71	Luis Martinez (Sr.)
TE	**88**	**DECORION TEMPLE (JR.)**	48	Nathan VanTimmeren (So.)
QB	**2**	**JOE LABAS (SR.)**	15	Jadyn Glasser (Fr.)
RB	0	Nahree Biggins (Sr.)	6	Trey Cornist (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	**44**	**KADE KOSTUS (JR.)**	81	Malik Denkins (Jr.)
DT	99	Jayshaun Coffman (Sr.)	96	Quavion Bird (Fr.)
DT	49	Keshawn Hayden (So.)	98	Jonathan Decker (Sr.)
DE	**97**	**MICHAEL HELDMAN (SR.)**	93	Daniel Bennett (Sr.)
LB	11	Dakota Cochran (Sr.)	14	Fernando Sanchez III (Sr.)
LB	**12**	**JORDAN KWIATKOWSKI (SR.)**	45	Xavier White (So.)
LB	40	Lawai'a Brown (Sr.)	33	Victor Earl (Fr.)
CB	10	Kalen Carroll (Jr.)	8	Aakeem Snell (Sr.)
CB	**4**	**JAION JACKSON (SO.)**	31	Marcus Badgett (Sr.)
SS	**15**	**CALEB SPANN (SR.)**	7	Ed Conoran (Jr.)
FS	**2**	**ELIJAH RIKARD (SR.)**	29	Elijah Gordon (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Cade Graham (Sr.)	KR	0	Nahree Biggins (Sr.)
P	18	Declan Duley (So.)	PR	31	Marcus Badgett (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

RON JOHNSON-IMAGN IMAGES

TERRY LOCKETT JR.

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"Their brand is fighting hard right now because of the portal. I think it's working against them because they've had success as a development program for those high-motor, overlooked guys. Teams come in and raid them because they know they're getting physical, tough players. ... Think of these guys a little bit like a Bill Synder-era Kansas State. Their culture is consistent, and you check your ego at the door. They don't have any position group or specific skill guy on the roster that scares you right now, but you know you're going to have to line up and fight these dudes all day. ... Their toughest challenge is maintaining their identity and trying to build some consistency and depth."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	18	Petey Tucker (Sr.)	7	Jamarien Wheeler (Sr.)
WR	**3**	**TERRY LOCKETT JR. (SR.)**	6	Zyell Griffin (Sr.)
WR	9	Porter Rooks (Sr.)	17	Benson Prosper (Jr.)
LT	76	Chris Mayo (Sr.)	72	Mack Indestad (Jr.)
LG	50	Owen Snively (Sr.)	66	Daniel Warnsman (Sr.)
C	**63**	**MICKEY REWOLINSKI (SR.)**	65	Nicholas Gallegos (Jr.)
RG	74	Spencer Webb (So.)	61	Jeremiah Jackson Jr. (Jr.)
RT	**73**	**JOSHUA ANDERSON (SR.)**	77	Dodji Dahoue (Sr.)
TE	88	Tanner Lemaster (Jr.)	84	Caden Vanderbush (Fr.)
QB	13	Noah Kim (Sr.)	10	Jeremiah Salem (Sr.)
RB	28	Dontae McMillan (Sr.)	21	Tavierre Dunlap (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	85	Jefferson Adam (Sr.)	53	Messiah Blair (Jr.)
NT	98	Donovan Green (Sr.)	99	Warren-Stevens Tayou (Jr.)
DT	93	Tyrell Martin (Sr.)	57	Makhi Gilbert (Jr.)
DE	33	Carter Evans (Sr.)	56	Sterling Miles (Sr.)
LB	45	Kadin Bailey (Sr.)	44	Marco Patierno (Jr.)
LB	11	Zach Mowchan (Sr.)	32	Kendric Nowling (Sr.)
CB	15	Jordan Toney (So.)	31	Jesse Vasquez (Sr.)
CB	**7**	**DRAMARIAN MCNULTY (SR.)**	22	Tyrelle Deener (Sr.)
NB	**1**	**JOSHUA SCOTT (SR.)**	28	Jaivian Norman (So.)
SS	39	Barry Manning (Jr.)	6	Bryce Llewellyn (Sr.)
FS	19	Davion Williams (Jr.)	34	Ray Hester (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Nathan Dibert (Sr.)	KR	24	Joey Mattord (Jr.)
P	30	Mitchell Tomasek (Sr.)	PR	24	Joey Mattord (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

STEVEN BISIG-IMAGN IMAGES

EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 120 | MAC PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 2-6 MAC

OFFENSE A three-man battle for QB1 will carry into August. Former Michigan State starter Noah Kim transferred in from Coastal Carolina, where he served as a backup in 2024. Kim started five games at MSU in 2023 before suffering a season-ending injury. Jeremiah Salem is a former walk-on who has the respect of many in the program. Cameron Edge comes to EMU from Maryland, where he backed up for two years.

Running back Dontae McMillan was the starter coming into last year but suffered a broken leg in Week 2 against Washington. He looks poised for a breakout season. Tavierre Dunlap comes to EMU after four years at Michigan, where he had 22 career carries.

Eastern Michigan returns one pass-catching starter in wideout Terry Lockett Jr. (third-team All-MAC). Porter Rooks, a former NC State WR who was hurt all of 2024 with the Eagles, returns for a sixth season.

The offensive line returns two starters in Mickey Rewolinski, who is moving from guard to center, and Joshua Anderson. Owen Snively is a sixth-year player who missed 2024 due to injury but will be counted on.

DEFENSE Two starters are back, both in the secondary. Cornerback Dramarian McNulty could earn all-league honors after showing promise in his first year after transferring from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. Jordan Toney will be opposite McNulty, and returning starter Joshua Scott will likely be the nickelback in EMU's 4-2-5 alignment.

The defensive line will see several rotational players move into bigger roles. Donovan Green anchors the middle after making 20 tackles as a reserve and starting the final four games of 2024. Defensive end Jefferson Adam is another player with starting experience, and FCS West Georgia transfer Warren-Stevens Tayou will also be in the mix. Senior rush end Carter Evans will look to recapture the success he had earlier in his career.

At linebacker, projected starter Luke Murphy retired at the start of spring practice. Zach Mowchan is coming off a torn ACL and will hopefully be 100% before the season kicks off.

SPECIALISTS Punter Mitchell Tomasek is back for his fourth and final season as starter for the Eagles. His numbers dropped as a junior (42.4-yard average) as he dealt with nagging injuries, but he is on pace to break multiple career school records. Kicker Nathan Dibert comes in from LSU.

FINAL ANALYSIS Veteran head coach Chris Creighton will add to his team via the transfer portal over the summer and reinforce a defense that is low on experience. It will be vital for the staff to pick the right guy in the three-man race for QB, especially with an inexperienced line. The Eagles will have to overachieve in order to reach a bowl game this season.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 2-6 MAC)

Aug. 31	at UMass	W	28-14
Sept. 7	at Washington	L	9-30
Sept. 14	Jacksonville State	W	37-34
Sept. 21	St. Francis (Pa.)	W	36-0
Sept. 28	at Kent State	W	52-33
Oct. 12	Miami (Ohio)	L	14-38
Oct. 19	Central Michigan	W	38-34
Oct. 26	at Akron	L	21-25
Nov. 2	Toledo	L	28-29
Nov. 13	at Ohio	L	10-35
Nov. 20	Buffalo	L	20-37
Nov. 30	at Western Michigan	L	18-26

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Texas State
Sept. 6	Long Island
Sept. 13	at Kentucky
Sept. 20	Louisiana
Sept. 27	at Central Michigan
Oct. 4	at Buffalo
Oct. 11	Northern Illinois
Oct. 18	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 25	Ohio
Nov. 8	Bowling Green
Nov. 15	at Ball State
Nov. 25	Western Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Amareon Blue, RB	★★★
2.	Tylan Boykin, S	★★★
3.	Donmiel Rogers, CB	★★★
4.	Jonnie Carter, S	★★★
5.	Antoniyo Smith, DL	★★★
6.	Zah'eed Pierre, CB	★★★
7.	Kevin Wojciechowski, OT	★★★
8.	Christian Kiptoo, EDGE	★★★
9.	Harold Mack, WR	★★★
10.	Bryce Button, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chris Creighton • Record at School: 57-75 (11 years) • Career Record: 196-121 (28 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Piatkowski • Defensive Coordinator: Ben Needham • Location: Ypsilanti, Mich. • Stadium: Rynearson Stadium (26,188)

KENT STATE GOLDEN FLASHES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 136 | MAC PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD: 0-12, 0-8 MAC

OFFENSE Kent State welcomes back quarterback Devin Kargman, who was the opening-day starter last season. He was injured on the second play of Week 4 at Penn State and never returned. Kargman is a classic dropback passer who can make plays with a clean pocket. Coaches are working with him on adjusting to coverages and throwing better under pressure.

Running back Jordan Nubin comes in from Minnesota and is eager to show he is a Big Ten-caliber back after getting limited playing time. Gavin Garcia was slated to be Kent State's top back last season, but he injured his knee and did not see the field. He is back and will see action in relief of Nubin.

The wide receiver group is young, but interim head coach Mark Carney loves its potential. Dashawn Martin will be the top receiving option after a promising true freshman season that included nine starts and third-team All-MAC honors as a kick returner. Wayne Harris redshirted last season but showed good ball skills in the spring, and Jay Jay Ethridge saw action in nine games as a true freshman after decommitting from Indiana.

DEFENSE Like most teams, Kent State is looking for depth along the defensive front in the transfer portal. Defensive tackle Mason Maddox and defensive end Mattheus Carroll do have experience. Maddox started on both the offensive and defensive lines a year ago, but he will be a permanent defensive tackle this season. Carroll is the Flashes' best pass-rusher. Antoine Campbell Jr. is on the other side, and the former UCLA transfer is working on his pass-rush skills.

Nylan Brown, an All-MAC candidate who looks poised to take off, will lead the linebackers. CJ Young had a solid spring, and the coaches feel this group has as much depth as any on the defensive side.

In the secondary, experienced field safety Tevin Tucker is back after making 65 tackles and forcing a fumble in eight starts last season. Sophomore cornerback Jaire Rawlison has plus ball skills and is comfortable in man or zone coverage.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Will Hryszko was 3-for-5 with a long of 40 yards on field goals last season and 15-for-15 on extra points. Charlie Durkin exited spring as the punter after serving as backup last season, but Kent State was looking to add competition in the portal before August. Receivers Martin and Harris hope to give the return game some juice.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kent State was last in the country in offense and defense (total and scoring) during its 0-12 season, then fired head coach Kenni Burns after an investigation into off-field activities. Carney faces a massive challenge, but even one win will be a step in the right direction.

2024 RESULTS (0-12, 0-8 MAC)

Aug. 31	at Pitt	L	24-55
Sept. 7	St. Francis (Pa.)	L	17-23
Sept. 14	at Tennessee	L	0-71
Sept. 21	at Penn State	L	0-56
Sept. 28	Eastern Michigan	L	33-52
Oct. 12	Ball State	L	35-37
Oct. 19	at Bowling Green	L	6-27
Oct. 26	at Western Michigan	L	21-52
Nov. 6	Ohio	L	0-41
Nov. 13	at Miami (Ohio)	L	7-34
Nov. 19	Akron	L	17-38
Nov. 26	at Buffalo	L	7-43

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Merrimack
Sept. 6	at Texas Tech
Sept. 13	Buffalo
Sept. 20	at Florida State
Oct. 4	at Oklahoma
Oct. 11	UMass
Oct. 18	at Toledo
Oct. 25	Bowling Green
Nov. 5	at Ball State
Nov. 11	at Akron
Nov. 19	Central Michigan
Nov. 28	at Northern Illinois

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Maurice Stephens, WR	★★★
2.	Trey Rubinstein, LB	★★★
3.	TaRyan Martin, RB	★★★
4.	Zy'Aire Fletcher, TE	★★★
5.	Deante Ruffin, QB	★★★
6.	Bryce Griffin, EDGE	★★★
7.	Teaunn Hunter, WR	★★★
8.	Darian Blachewicz, EDGE	★★★
9.	BuddyRow Garrer, WR	★★★
10.	Joel Cordoba, S	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mark Carney • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Mark Carney
Defensive Coordinator: Kody Morgan • Location: Kent, Ohio • Stadium: Dix Stadium (25,319)

DEVIN KARGMAN

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN FLASHES

"This program is at rock bottom. This is the worst situation in all of FBS football, and not just because they fired their head coach in March. There are no resources, no commitment and the football program basically exists to fund the athletic department. They take as many paycheck games as possible and get smashed up before conference play ever starts. ... What [former head coach] Sean Lewis did there, it's a miracle. ... Something has to change for this program to attract any kind of competent staff. I don't think they could get a quality FCS guy at this point, unless they're just there to cash a slightly bigger check. ... [Kenni] Burns took the job because they offered it and it was a pay increase. That's it."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	22	**DASHAWN MARTIN (SO.)**	13	Ardell Banks (So.)
WR	82	Wayne Harris (Fr.)	81	Dash Dorsey (So.)
WR	25	Jay Jay Etheridge (So.)	21	Cade Wolford (Fr.)
LT	74	Jamarcus Hill (Jr.)	72	Cecil Wilson (So.)
LG	57	**DUSTYN MORELL (JR.)**	55	Jaxon Dunn (Fr.)
C	72	Cecil Wilson (So.)	55	Jaxon Dunn (Fr.)
RG	76	Garrett Masterson (Jr.)	72	Cecil Wilson (So.)
RT	68	Junior Diallo (Jr.)	72	Cecil Wilson (So.)
TE	18	Hunter Hopperton (Jr.)		Christian Berry (Jr.)
QB	15	Devin Kargman (Jr.)	12	Dru DeShields (Fr.)
RB	27	Jordan Nubin (Jr.)	5	Gavin Garcia (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

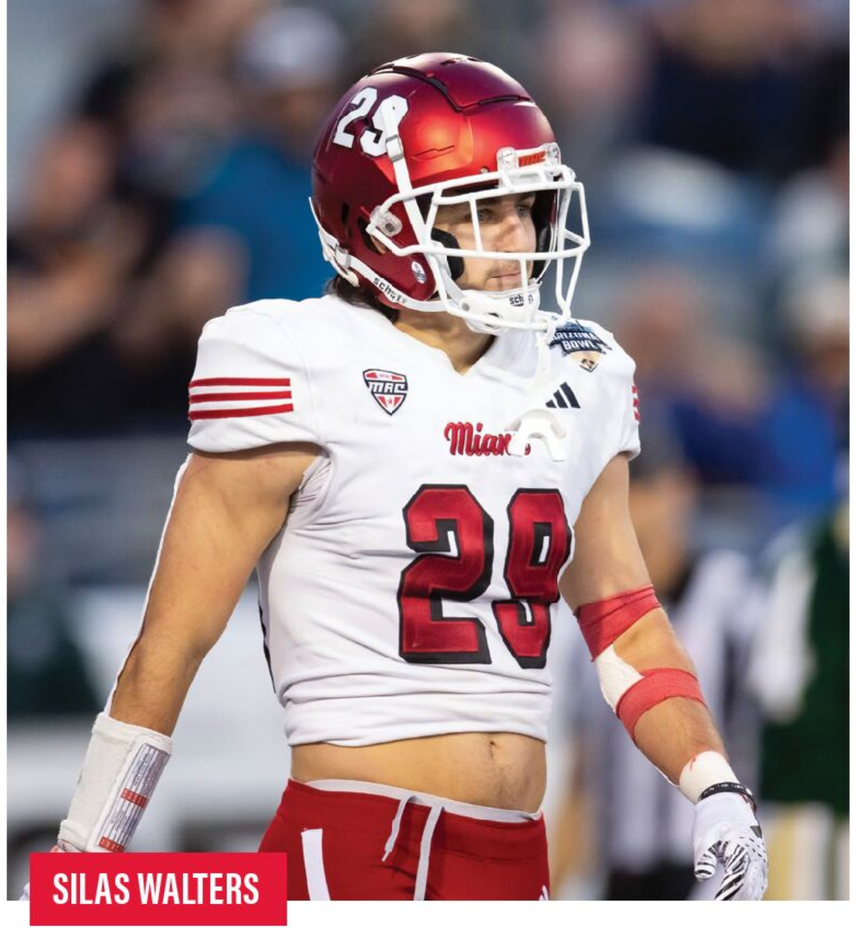
DE	17	Mattheus Carroll (Sr.)	97	Jamond Mathis (So.)
DT	55	Thomas Aden (Jr.)	92	Josue Cordoba (Fr.)
DT	90	Mason Maddox (Jr.)	52	Aiden Burgess (Fr.)
DE	11	Antoine Campbell Jr. (Sr.)	93	Jaihien Roy (Fr.)
SLB	10	**CANAAN WILLIAMS (JR.)**	51	Sayed Abuhamdeh (So.)
MLB	43	Nylan Brown (So.)	42	Semaj Cross (Sr.)
WLB	26	CJ Young (So.)	51	Sayed Abuhamdeh (So.)
CB	22	Jaire Rawlison (Fr.)	12	Joel Boamah (So.)
CB	23	Angelo Stockstill (So.)	12	Joel Boamah (So.)
BS	19	DJ Barnes (Jr.)	21	Joel Cordoba (Fr.)
FS	13	**TEVIN TUCKER (SO.)**	38	Clinton Robinson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Will Hryszko (Jr.)	KR	22	Dashawn Martin (So.)
P	61	Charlie Durkin (Jr.)	PR	82	Wayne Harris (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MATTHEW O'HAREN-IMAGN IMAGES



SILAS WALTERS

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE REDHAWKS

"Chuck [Martin] has lived through it all. You have to give him credit for reinventing the program and building them into a great team these last few years. I think the school's been patient and supportive, and it paid off. But it's going to be really hard to match what they've done the last two seasons. They're one of the 'nametag' rosters in this league. Their offense is basically gone. All of it. They got [Dequan] Finn to come back to the league; he's more mobile than [Brett] Gabbert, and he should play at that Toledo level. And they brought in a bunch of P4 level receivers. ... Half their defensive starters are gone, and they were really physical and fast last year. Defense will be their strength this season, but it's a rebuild for sure."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	15	Deion Colzie (Sr.)	0	Keith Reynolds (So.)
WR	3	Darion Williamson (Sr.)	5	Cordale Russell (So.)
WR	10	Kam Perry (Jr.)	2	Brady Simmons (Jr.)
LT	51	Eric Smith (Jr.)	73	Brandon Lawhorn Moore (Jr.)
LG	74	Greg Smith Jr. (So.)	54	Aiden Howard (Fr.)
C	72	Kris Manu (Fr.)	69	Marcus White (Sr.)
RG	76	Gavin Rohrs (Jr.)	79	Jacob Schorsch (Fr.)
RT	78	Drew Terrill (Jr.)	61	Andrew Lowry (So.)
TE	44	Grant Leeper (Fr.)	45	Mitch Bolden (So.)
QB	1	Dequan Finn (Sr.)	12	Henry Hesson (Sr.)
RB	9	Kenny Tracy (Sr.)	6	Jordan Brunson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	20	Adam Trick (Jr.)	9	Javon Hammonds (So.)
DT	97	William Goodvine III (Fr.)	**52**	**NASIR WASHINGTON (SR.)**
DT	92	Roosevelt Andrews III (So.)	55	Malachi Clark (Jr.)
DE	94	Josh Lukusa (Jr.)	47	Brach Rice (Fr.)
LB	12	Corban Hondru (Sr.)	50	Jayden Fuller (So.)
MLB	25	Malcolm McCain (So.)	33	Jackson Kuwatch (Sr.)
CB	17	Kaleb Martin (So.)	24	Mychal Yharbrough (Jr.)
CB	21	Toney Coleman Jr. (So.)	**2**	**LUKE EVANS (SO.)**
NB	**23**	**OSCAR MCWOOD (SR.)**	34	Christian McKinney (So.)
S	**16**	**ELI BLAKEY (SR.)**	8	Koy Beasley (Fr.)
S	**29**	**SILAS WALTERS (SR.)**	22	Jackson Pons (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	31	Dom Dzioban (Sr.)	KR 82	Lynel Billups-Williams (So.)
P	31	Dom Dzioban (Sr.)	PR 82	Lynel Billups-Williams (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MIAMI (OHIO) REDHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 81 | MAC PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 9-5, 7-1 MAC

OFFENSE The RedHawks have zero returning starters on offense, but there is still some optimism. Quarterback Dequan Finn, the 2023 MAC MVP, is returning to the league after one season at Baylor. Finn was a successful three-year starter at Toledo, leading the Rockets to two MAC title games. Finn is a lot more mobile than the player he replaces, Brett Gabbert.

Kenny Tracy is slated to be RB1 after missing last season with a torn ACL suffered in August. Tracy was not 100% in spring drills but participated in a limited capacity and is hopeful he will be ready to play in August. Jordan Brunson had 299 rushing yards in a reserve role last season.

The wide receiver room has been restocked with Power 4 transfers. Deion Colzie comes in from Notre Dame, where he could never crack the rotation despite a 4-star rating coming out of high school. Darion Williamson (Florida State), Keith Reynolds (Washington), Cordale Russell (Colorado) and Brady Simmons (Indiana) also arrive.

Left tackle Brandon Lawhorn Moore was expected to start in 2024 but missed the season to injury. The coaching staff feels that guard Greg Smith Jr. has all-league potential.

DEFENSE Miami has finished no lower than fifth in the MAC in total defense over the past nine seasons, so while there are several holes to fill, head coach Chuck Martin and his staff will figure it out. At defensive end, Adam Trick moves from a pass rush specialist (4.5 sacks) to a full-time starter. The two linebackers will be new starters, but Corban Hondru saw extensive time sharing time at nickel (70 tackles), and middle linebacker Malcolm McCain subbed in as an extra LB in running situations.

Oscar McWood will take over at nickel full-time with Hondru moving to linebacker, and both safeties are back. Silas Walters is the team's leading returning tackler with 95, and he also totaled 12 PBUs. Safety Eli Blakey was third-team All-MAC last season. The corners will be new.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Dom Dzioban was first-team All-MAC after nailing 26-of-30 field goals, including 19-of-19 inside 40. He was an all-league punter in 2022, then missed 2023 due to a leg injury. He returned last year as the primary field-goal kicker and has a chance to do both in 2025.

FINAL ANALYSIS Look for Miami to be in the league title hunt once again. The RedHawks have not had a losing season in league play since 2015 and have played in the MAC Championship Game in three of the past six seasons. The offense is a work in progress, but Finn has shown he can dominate the league with the right pieces around him. The defense should be in the upper half of the league again.

2024 RESULTS (9-5, 7-1 MAC)

Aug. 31	at Northwestern	L	6-13
Sept. 14	Cincinnati	L	16-27
Sept. 21	at Notre Dame	L	3-28
Sept. 28	UMass (ot)	W	23-20
Oct. 5	at Toledo	L	20-30
Oct. 12	at Eastern Michigan	W	38-14
Oct. 19	Ohio	W	30-20
Oct. 26	Central Michigan	W	56-7
Nov. 5	at Ball State	W	27-21
Nov. 13	Kent State	W	34-7
Nov. 19	Northern Illinois	W	20-9
Nov. 29	at Bowling Green	W	28-12
Dec. 7	vs. Ohio #	L	3-38
Dec. 28	vs. Colorado State %	W	43-17

#Detroit %Arizona Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at Wisconsin
Sept. 6	at Rutgers
Sept. 20	UNLV
Sept. 27	Lindenwood
Oct. 4	at Northern Illinois
Oct. 11	at Akron
Oct. 18	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 25	Western Michigan
Nov. 4	at Ohio
Nov. 12	Toledo
Nov. 19	at Buffalo
Nov. 29	Ball State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Noah Ehrlich, QB	★★★
2.	Jerome Smith, S	★★★
3.	Adrian Walker Jr., ATH	★★★
4.	Aariz Taylor, EDGE	★★★
5.	Trey Zvonar, TE	★★★
6.	Anthony Ludington, EDGE	★★★
7.	Carson Noonan, DL	★★★
8.	Carmine Orozco, DL	★★★
9.	Brendan Loftus, TE	★★★
10.	Jameil Hamm, EDGE	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chuck Martin • Record at School: 65-67 (11 years)
Career Record: 139-74 (17 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Pat Welsh
Defensive Coordinator: Bill Brechin • Location: Oxford, Ohio
Stadium: Fred C. Yager Stadium (30,087)

NORTHERN ILLINOIS HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 108 | MAC PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE New offensive coordinator Quinn Sanders promises a more up-tempo offense for the Huskies, but he isn't sure who will be under center come fall. Northern Illinois went through spring ball with Josh Holst and Jalen Macon getting most of the quarterback snaps. Holst saw action in seven games last season and passed for 593 yards and rushed for 230 as a backup to Ethan Hampton. Dual-threat FCS Dartmouth transfer Jackson Proctor will also get a long look in August.

There should be a balanced attack from the running back position, with veteran Telly Johnson Jr. leading the way. He stepped up when needed in 2024 and rushed for 480 yards and four TDs. Romelo Ware opened eyes in spring ball, and Jaylon Poe also comes in with relevant experience.

The pass-catchers will mostly be unknown. La'Don Bryant stood out in the spring among the new crop of receivers, as did transfers Gary Givens and DeAree Rogers.

The offensive line will need to be rebuilt, save for Evan Malcore, who will be an All-MAC candidate this season at left tackle. Izuchukwu Ozoh took over at right tackle in the spring and was a force.

DEFENSE Two starters are back from a defense that ranked No. 14 in the nation in scoring a year ago, and they are both ends named Williams. Roy Williams was second-team All-MAC a year ago with 6.5 sacks and looks to have an NFL future. Jalonnie Williams (no relation) will man the other end spot after entering the transfer portal and then returning.

Marc Pretto missed most of 2024 due to injury, but he impressed all spring at his linebacker spot. Quinn Urwiler had 32 tackles in 13 games as a reserve linebacker a year ago and will be counted on as a starter. Dartmouth transfer Danny Cronin is another linebacker to watch.

In the secondary, new defensive coordinator Rob Harley will have some experience to work with. Corner Jacob Finley has started multiple games and had a pick and eight pass breakups, and safeties Muhammed Jammeh and Cyrus McGarrell also saw action in all 13 games.

SPECIALISTS Andrew Glass is coming in from Kent State to take over the placekicking duties, and there will be a battle for starting punter duties between transfer Danny Vuckovic and Gavin Myers.

FINAL ANALYSIS Northern Illinois pulled off the season's most shocking upset with its 16-14 victory at Notre Dame in early September, but the Huskies only managed a .500 record in MAC play. With two new coordinators and few returning starters, it may take some time for the Huskies to get their feet under them, but the coaches like the talent they have, and a third straight bowl game is certainly the expectation.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 MAC)

Aug. 31	Western Illinois	W	54-15
Sept. 7	at Notre Dame	W	16-14
Sept. 21	Buffalo (ot)	L	20-23
Sept. 28	at NC State	L	17-24
Oct. 5	UMass	W	34-20
Oct. 12	at Bowling Green	W	17-7
Oct. 19	Toledo	L	6-13
Oct. 26	at Ball State	L	23-25
Nov. 6	at Western Michigan	W	42-28
Nov. 13	Akron	W	29-16
Nov. 19	at Miami (Ohio)	L	9-20
Nov. 30	Central Michigan	W	24-16
Dec. 23	vs. Fresno State # (ot)	W	28-20

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Holy Cross
Sept. 6	at Maryland
Sept. 20	at Mississippi State
Sept. 27	San Diego State
Oct. 4	Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 11	at Eastern Michigan
Oct. 18	at Ohio
Oct. 25	Ball State
Nov. 5	at Toledo
Nov. 12	at UMass
Nov. 18	Western Michigan
Nov. 28	Kent State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	James Finley, S	★★★★
2.	Caleb Haack, TE	★★★
3.	Austin Tillman, CB	★★★
4.	Micah Cook, EDGE	★★★
5.	Montrel Canion, DL	★★★
6.	Fawzy Omotoso, EDGE	★★★
7.	Eliot Hummer, LB	★★★
8.	Brady Davidson, QB	★★★
9.	Afy Ibekwe, WR	★★★
10.	Lazaro Rogers, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Thomas Hammock • Record at School: 32-38 (6 years)
Career Record: 32-38 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Quinn Sanders
Defensive Coordinator: Rob Harley • Location: DeKalb, Ill.
Stadium: Huskie Stadium (28,211)

TELLY JOHNSON JR.

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"I think they're going to look completely different than what we've seen in recent years from [Thomas] Hammock. They're overhauling the offense and getting away from big, pro set, run-it-at-you ball control. The new OC is going to spread them out and pass more. I wonder if that's just a response to their struggles in conference play last year or if it's also to adapt to moving to the Mountain West. Maybe both? ... Their challenge is keeping the culture in place. This is normally a bigger, more physical, more talented team in the league, and they can recruit at a higher level. You also wonder where Hammock is at after this many seasons and a big conference change coming up. He has a strong NFL assistant résumé and could end up going back."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	11	Gary Givens (So.)	0	La'Don Bryant (Fr.)
WR	3	Rickey Taylor Jr. (Fr.)	84	George Dimopoulos (So.)
WR	6	DeAree Rogers (Jr.)	8	Dane Pardridge (Jr.)
LT	**54**	**EVAN MALCORE (JR.)**	58	Ross Liegel (Fr.)
LG	75	Thomas Paasch (So.)	53	Luke Skartvedt (So.)
C	64	Aidan Tweedy (Sr.)	63	Landon Hron (So.)
RG	55	Abiathar Curry (Jr.)	66	Lane Mahnesmith (Fr.)
RT	77	Izuchukwu Ozoh (Sr.)	61	Ben Gustafson (Fr.)
TE	80	Jake Appleget (Jr.)	8	Pierce Oppong (Sr.)
QB	15	Josh Holst (So.)	14	Jalen Macon (Jr.)
RB	1	Telly Johnson Jr. (So.)	20	Romelo Ware (Fr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	**11**	**JALONNIE WILLIAMS (SR.)**	5	Davonte Murray (Sr.)
NT	90	Reggie Jean (Jr.)	6	Dasean Dixon (Sr.)
DT	10	Mark Hensley (So.)	44	Montrel Canion (Fr.)
DE	**97**	**ROY WILLIAMS (SR.)**	8	Pierce Oppong (Sr.)
LB	23	Marc Pretto (Jr.)	25	Jake Gassaway (Jr.)
LB	32	Quinn Urwiler (Sr.)	19	Danny Cronin (Sr.)
CB	7	Donte Harrison (Sr.)	9	Dev'ion Reynolds (Fr.)
CB	3	Jacob Finley (Jr.)	12	Keshawn Lyons (Jr.)
NB	1	Ty Myles (Sr.)	33	Taylor Powell (Fr.)
SS	6	Muhammed Jammeh (Sr.)	24	Brody Windham (Jr.)
FS	22	Jasper Beeler (Jr.)	2	Cyrus McGarrell (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	60	Andrew Glass (Sr.)	KR	9	Dev'ion Reynolds (Fr.)
P	90	Danny Vuckovic (So.)	PR	8	Dane Pardridge (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

LOREN ORR/GETTY IMAGES

PARKER NAVARRO

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"One of the most consistent programs in college football from [Frank] Solich on. Tim Albin picked it up and improved on it, and now he's gone and they're keeping it in house again. Makes total sense from the outside because they're locked in on culture and identity. I think they're as consistent as you could be when you lose a head coach to another program. ... They lost a few of their defensive starters to Charlotte, but I remember going into last season, they reworked the defensive side and brought a lot of new guys in, and it worked huge for them, and they kept the co-DC. More than a few of those assistants stayed on the staff, too. ... I don't expect a major drop-off, but they're probably not going to repeat as conference champions."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	**11**	**RODNEY HARRIS II (JR.)**	12	Eian Pugh (Jr.)
WR	**7**	**CHASE HENDRICKS (JR.)**	3	Max Rodarte (Sr.)
WR	88	Caleb Gossett (Sr.)	9	Alfred Jordan Jr. (Sr.)
LT	**51**	**DAVION WEATHERSPOON (SR.)**	65	Jake Skelly (Sr.)
LG	65	Josh Waite (Jr.)	73	Joseph Habinowski (Sr.)
C	67	Kam Wright (Jr.)	64	Seth Anstead (So.)
RG	60	Trent Allen (Sr.)	71	Aidan Johnson (So.)
RT	55	Jordon Jones (Jr.)	75	Jarian Shelby (Jr.)
TE	**85**	**MASON WILLIAMS (SO.)**	86	Jake Bruno (Sr.)
QB	**13**	**PARKER NAVARRO (SR.)**	8	Nick Poulos (Sr.)
RB	5	Sieh Bangura (Sr.)	6	Duncan Brune (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	15	Anas Luqman (Jr.)	4	Kaci Seegars (Sr.)
DT	97	Austin Mitchell (So.)	92	RJ Keuchler (So.)
DT	44	Nehemiah Dukes (Jr.)	57	Nathan Hale (Sr.)
DE	11	Evan Herrmann (Jr.)	95	Walter Bob Jr. (Sr.)
LB	25	Michael Molnar (Jr.)	33	Bradley Sestili (So.)
LB	27	Jack Fries (Jr.)	30	Charlie Christopher (Fr.)
CB	**7**	**TANK PEARSON (SR.)**	23	Tony Mathis (So.)
CB	9	Michael Mack II (Sr.)	29	JT Haskins (So.)
NB	**5**	**ADONIS WILLIAMS JR. (SR.)**	22	Jalen Thomeson (Jr.)
SS	6	Ricky Hyatt Jr. (Sr.)	**28**	**JAYLEN JOHNSON (SR.)**
FS	**21**	**DJ WALKER (SO.)**	2	Miles Fleming (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	David Dellenbach (Fr.)	KR	10	Eamonn Dennis (Sr.)
P		Kolten Bartels (Fr.)	PR	3	Max Rodarte (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NATHAN RAY SEEBECK-IMAGN IMAGES

OHIO BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 82 | MAC PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 7-1 MAC

OFFENSE The Bobcats welcome back seven of their top nine pass-catchers as well as running back Sieh Bangura, who transferred to Minnesota last season only to return to Ohio for 2025. Perhaps most important is quarterback Parker Navarro, who was one of the most productive players in the country last season, passing for 2,423 yards and 13 TDs and rushing for 1,054 yards and 18 more scores. Coleman Owen — Navarro's favorite target — is gone, but Chase Hendricks, Rodney Harris II and Caleb Gossett combined for 79 receptions and 918 yards.

Bangura, a 6-foot, 210-pound Ferrari, rushed for a combined 1,889 yards and 20 touchdowns when he was with the Bobcats in 2022 and '23. He'll need to replicate those numbers to make coaches and fans forget about Anthony Tyus III, who rushed for 1,215 yards in 2024 and helped Ohio rank 12th nationally in rushing offense (213.1 ypg).

Who will block for Bangura and protect Navarro? Davion Weatherspoon, who started 12 games (five at LG, seven at LT), is back, as is Trent Allen, who made four starts at left guard. Beyond that, it's a mystery.

DEFENSE The Bobcats had one of the best defenses in the country a year ago, allowing 303.1 yards and 18.1 points per game. But seven starters from that unit are gone. Defensive coordinator John Hauser remains on Brian Smith's staff, a critical boost for the first-time head coach.

Cornerback Tank Pearson, nickelback Adonis Williams Jr. and safeties DJ Walker and Jaylen Johnson are the only returning starters, leaving Ohio with an incredibly green front seven. Only one member of the projected starting defensive line has ever played a game for the Bobcats.

Linebackers Michael Molnar and Jack Fries have played 29 career games and recorded 18 tackles.

The secondary is chock full of Power 4 transfers — Michael Mack II (Wisconsin), Ricky Hyatt Jr. (Kentucky), Jaylen Johnson (Ohio State) and Miles Fleming (Minnesota).

SPECIALISTS UCLA transfer David Dellenbach replaces departing kicker Jack Wilson. Incoming freshman Kolten Bartels will punt. Eamonn Dennis, a special teams contributor on Michigan's 2023 national championship team, is back for his final season at Ohio.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Smith era got off to a stellar start with a win in the Cure Bowl. But now the hard part begins — rebuilding the roster. Can history repeat itself in 2025? Few teams in college football were as pillaged by the transfer portal as Ohio last season, as the Bobcats lost nearly their entire two-deep roster. All they did was regroup to win 11 games and their first Mid-American Conference championship since 1968.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 7-1 MAC)

Aug. 31	at Syracuse	L	22-38
Sept. 7	South Alabama	W	27-20
Sept. 14	Morgan State	W	21-6
Sept. 21	at Kentucky	L	6-41
Sept. 28	Akron	W	30-10
Oct. 12	at Central Michigan	W	27-25
Oct. 19	at Miami (Ohio)	L	20-30
Oct. 26	Buffalo	W	47-16
Nov. 6	at Kent State	W	41-0
Nov. 13	Eastern Michigan	W	35-10
Nov. 20	at Toledo	W	24-7
Nov. 29	Ball State	W	42-21
Dec. 7	vs. Miami (Ohio) #	W	38-3
Dec. 20	vs. Jacksonville State %	W	30-27

#Detroit %Cure Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at Rutgers
Sept. 6	West Virginia
Sept. 13	at Ohio State
Sept. 20	Gardner-Webb
Sept. 27	Bowling Green
Oct. 4	at Ball State
Oct. 18	Northern Illinois
Oct. 25	at Eastern Michigan
Nov. 4	Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 11	at W. Michigan
Nov. 18	UMass
Nov. 28	at Buffalo

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ike Ackerman, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Tyson Long, CB	★★★
3.	Mike Taylor Jr., RB	★★★
4.	Ibrahim Kebe, OT	★★★
5.	Hype Grand, QB	★★★
6.	Bobby Miller, CB	★★★
6.	Irving Brown, RB	★★★
8.	Jermaine Minnis, LB	★★★
9.	Brandon Weaver, DL	★★★
10.	Ty Neubert, IOL	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Smith • Record at School: 1-0 (1 year) • Career Record: 1-0 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Scott Isphording • Defensive Coordinator: John Hauser • Location: Athens, Ohio • Stadium: Peden Stadium (25,210)

TOLEDO ROCKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 74 | MAC PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE Senior quarterback Tucker Gleason will be looking for All-MAC honors after throwing for 2,808 yards in 2024 with 24 touchdowns and eight interceptions. He upped his completion percentage to 61% and made the right decisions regarding when to tuck it and run.

The Rockets fell from 16th in the nation in rushing in 2023 to 108th in 2024, so getting the running game fixed is a priority. Injury-plagued transfer Chip Trayanum will play out his sixth and final season as the likely RB1 for Toledo after two years at Arizona State, two years at Ohio State and one year at Kentucky. The offensive line returns three starters and also imported left tackle Jonathan Harder (Cincinnati) and center Terrence Moore (Pitt) in an attempt to improve. Guard Ethan Spoth was third-team All-MAC last season and has the versatility to move to center.

On the perimeter, wide receiver Junior Vandeross III is coming off a first-team All-MAC season in which he posted 85 catches and 957 yards. Northern Illinois transfer Trayvon Rudolph has been an All-MAC performer before, and he will get another shot in the final season of his career.

DEFENSE Cornerback Avery Smith was a second-team All-MAC selection last year and will be joined by nickel Braden Awls, who led the team with four INTs and is the team's leading returning tackler, and Nasir Bowers. At safety, Emmanuel McNeil-Warren was having a strong campaign before suffering a season-ending injury. Safety Jaden Dottin had a big bowl game and is primed for a strong season on the back line.

Toledo's 4-2-5 alignment will welcome a pair of new starting linebackers. Damon Ollison II saw significant action as a reserve last season and played well late in the year. Langston Long arrives from South Florida and will compete for the other starting spot with Chris D'Appolonia.

Up front, Esean Carter and Mortez Poynter were in the rotation last season and will need to take on larger roles. On the outside, UMass transfer Louce Julien, Malachi Davis and senior Anthony Dunn Jr. (four sacks last season) will compete to start at defensive end.

SPECIALISTS Punter Emilio Duran returns for his third season after averaging 43.1 yards per kick as a sophomore. Sophomore kicker Dylan Cunanan was 15-of-21 on field-goal attempts as a freshman. Bryson Hammer was named second-team All-MAC as a punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Jason Candle has set the bar so high that an 8-5 season with a bowl win over Pitt is considered a down year. Toledo is hoping to get back to a run-first offense, complemented by a strong passing game. Defensively, a lights-out secondary should keep Toledo in every game.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 MAC)

Aug. 29	Duquesne	W	49-10
Sept. 7	UMass	W	38-23
Sept. 14	at Mississippi State	W	41-17
Sept. 21	at WKU	L	21-26
Oct. 5	Miami (Ohio)	W	30-20
Oct. 12	at Buffalo	L	15-30
Oct. 19	at Northern Illinois	W	13-6
Oct. 26	Bowling Green	L	26-41
Nov. 2	at Eastern Michigan	W	29-28
Nov. 12	Central Michigan	W	37-10
Nov. 20	Ohio	L	7-24
Nov. 26	at Akron (ot)	L	14-21
Dec. 26	vs. Pitt # (ot)	W	48-46

#Game Above Sports Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Kentucky
Sept. 6	WKU
Sept. 13	Morgan State
Sept. 20	at W. Michigan
Sept. 27	Akron
Oct. 11	at Bowling Green
Oct. 18	Kent State
Oct. 25	at Washington St.
Nov. 5	Northern Illinois
Nov. 12	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 22	Ball State
Nov. 29	at Central Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Omar Mims, WR	★★★★
2.	Noah Sanders, RB	★★★
3.	Jayden Price, S	★★★
4.	Kamren Flowers, WR	★★★
5.	John Baker IV, EDGE	★★★
6.	Shawn Simeon, RB	★★★
7.	Ryder Treadway, WR	★★★
8.	Cade Wilhelmi, IOL	★★★
9.	Walter Moses, QB	★★★
10.	Samuel Toniolo, DL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jason Candle • Record at School: 73-40 (9+ years)
Career Record: 73-40 (9+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Mike Hallett, Robert Weiner • Defensive Coordinator: Vince Kehres
Location: Toledo, Ohio • Stadium: Glass Bowl (36,852)

TUCKER GLEASON

SCOUTING THE ROCKETS

"Easily this league's most talented group of incoming players, between the portal and high school. They return more talent than anyone else, and they've shown they can hang on to a few players and not just lose every star guy to a bigger program. ... Keeping the coach is absolutely massive. They should be the favorites to win the conference. ... The quarterback is legit; he balled out on a SEC team last year. Watch out for the receiver [Trayvon Rudolph]; he was a big playmaker last time he was in the league at NIU. They could be really, really good on offense this year. ... The gap between these guys and the rest of the league is widening, which increases the expectation they win a championship."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	81	Eric Holley III (Sr.)	8	Zy'marion Lang (So.)
WR		Trayvon Rudolph (Sr.)	84	Thomas Zsiros (Sr.)
WR	2	**JUNIOR VANDEROSS III (SR.)**	19	Terrell Crosby Jr. (Jr.)
LT		Jonathan Harder (Jr.)	65	Stephen Gales (Jr.)
LG	66	**CARTER FOUTY (SR.)**		Christian Medlock (So.)
C		Terrence Moore (Sr.)	64	Brian Keane (Jr.)
RG	72	**ETHAN SPOTH (JR.)**	63	Grant Zimmerly (So.)
RT	74	**COLE RHETT (SO.)**	55	Ibrahim Traore (Sr.)
TE		Jacob Peterson (Sr.)	85	CC Ezirim (Jr.)
QB	4	**TUCKER GLEASON (SR.)**	6	John Alan Richter (Jr.)
RB		Chip Trayanum (Sr.)		Kenji Christian (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	93	Malachi Davis (Jr.)	58	Anthony Dunn Jr. (Sr.)
DT	59	Martez Poynter (Sr.)	97	Doran Ray Jr. (Sr.)
DT	90	Esean Carter (Sr.)	91	Laith Shamma (So.)
DE		Louce Julien (Sr.)	46	Jeremiah Peters (Sr.)
MLB		Langston Long (Sr.)	49	Chris D'Appolonia (So.)
LB	37	Damon Ollison II (Sr.)	38	K'Von Sherman (Jr.)
CB	12	**AVERY SMITH (SR.)**		Amare Snowden (So.)
CB	21	**NASIR BOWERS (SR.)**	23	Tyler McKinstry (So.)
NB	26	**BRADEN AWLS (JR.)**	3	Andre Fuller (Sr.)
SS	7	**EMMANUEL MCNEIL-WARREN (SR.)**		Andrew Wilson-Lamp (Jr.)
FS	3	Jaden Dottin (Sr.)		Braedyn Moore (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	45	Dylan Cunanan (So.)	KR		Trayvon Rudolph (Sr.)
P	36	Emilio Duran (Jr.)	PR	33	Bryson Hammer (So)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

T.Y. HARDING

ERIC CANHA-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE MINUTEMEN

"Moving to a league is going to help them recruiting players for the rebuild. They're not going to be good, but they might be better than the very bottom of the league, like Kent. ... They have some good offensive linemen right now, and Joe [Harasymiak] is pushing the line of scrimmage on both sides, being really hard-nosed and fighting. They just don't really have the bodies to do that successfully through an entire season. ... It's a long-term effort here, I don't want to call it a rebuild because they don't really have a concept for success. The program's been out on an island for a long time and a death sentence for coaches, but moving to a league is a step in the right direction."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	**JACQUON GIBSON (SO.)**	5	Tyree Kelly (Jr.)
WR	10	T.Y. Harding (So.)	7	Jake McConnachie (Sr.)
WR	82	Kenyon Massey (Fr.)	17	Elliott Dallas (Jr.)
LT	**79**	**RYAN MOSESSO (JR.)**	75	Tanner Burlinggame (Fr.)
LG	56	Sullivan Weidman (Jr.)	64	Peyton Miller (Fr.)
C	**55**	**BENJAMIN ROY JR. (JR.)**	73	Brock Taylor (Fr.)
RG	54	Mao Glynn II (Jr.)	67	Cole Erickson (So.)
RT	71	Luke Painton (Sr.)	77	Jaxson King (Jr.)
TE	87	Owen Anderson (So.)	83	Reece Adkins (Sr.)
QB	3	Grant Jordan (Sr.)	8	AJ Hairston (Fr.)
RB	24	Rocko Griffin (Jr.)	30	Cookie Desiderio (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	2	Joshua Nobles (Sr.)	10	Zukudo Igwenagu (Sr.)
NT	**11**	**TIM GRANT-RANDALL (SR.)**	91	Shymell Davis (Sr.)
DT	49	Shambre Jackson (Jr.)	90	Timothy Passmore (So.)
DE	35	David Onuoha (Sr.)	50	Aquan Robinson (Jr.)
LB	15	Derrieon Craig (Jr.)	52	Dean Shaffer (Sr.)
MLB	44	Timmy Hinspeter (Sr.)	5	Tyler Martin (So.)
CB	1	Malcolm Greene (Sr.)	8	Jashon Watkins (Sr.)
CB	14	Ryan Barnes (Jr.)	7	TJ Magee (Jr.)
NB	24	Kamren Watkins-Hunter (Sr.)	8	Jashon Watkins (Sr.)
SS	4	DD Snyder (Jr.)	38	Zeraun Daniel (Jr.)
FS	6	Jeremiah McGill (So..)	21	Kendall Bournes (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Derek Morris (So.)	KR	10 T.Y. Harding (So.)
P	98	Keegan Andrews (Jr.)	PR	10 T.Y. Harding (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

UMASS MINUTEMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 135 | MAC PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 2-10

OFFENSE UMass is starting over with a new head coach (Joe Harasymiak), a new conference (the Mid-American) and a new quarterback. There was a two-man QB battle in the spring between FCS Yale transfer Grant Jordan and last season's backup AJ Hairston. Jordan threw for 1,919 yards and 22 touchdowns and rushed for five more in just nine games at Yale. He threw only three interceptions. Hairston has the better arm and completed 55% of his passes with five TDs and no interceptions off the bench. Utah transfer Brandon Rose is also in the mix.

Running back Rocko Griffin arrives as a sixth-year senior from UTSA via Vanderbilt, and he impressed in the spring.

T.Y. Harding is the team's leading returning receiver, an All-MAC candidate who can play inside and outside and had five touchdown catches last season. Jacquon Gibson is also back after catching 23 balls for 270 yards. At tight end, UMass will look to add players in the transfer portal.

Right tackle Luke Painton, a potential NFL prospect who was injured in the first game last season and lost for the year, will lead the line.

DEFENSE The strength of a revamped UMass defense should be in the secondary. Strong safety DD Snyder, who played at Illinois and Ball State before coming to UMass, impressed in the spring. Corner Malcolm Greene brings experience from Virginia and Clemson and will slide into a starting role.

Derrieon Craig was a rotation player at linebacker, and he will battle former Yale captain Dean Shaffer for the starting spot. Timmy Hinspeter, who came with Harasymiak from Rutgers, should be the middle linebacker, and Tyler Martin had 27 tackles off the bench as a reserve for UMass.

Nose tackle Tim Grant-Randall is the leader along the defensive line. Defensive tackle Shambre Jackson is the most athletic interior lineman and will get a shot to start alongside Grant-Randall. Defensive end Joshua Nobles comes in with MAC experience after three years at Western Michigan before spending 2024 at FCS Jackson State.

SPECIALISTS Both the punter and kicker are new. Australian Keegan Andrews arrives from Texas A&M, where he did not crack the starting lineup. Derek Morris kicked at Cal last season, hitting 11-of-15 field goals and all 13 of his extra points. His longest field goal was 46 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Since elevating to the FBS level in 2012, UMass has never won more than four games in a season, and it is hard to see it happening this season as it returns to the MAC after a four-year run from 2012-15 (when it went 7-25 in league play). Harasymiak has his hands full as he tries to create excitement in Year 1.

2024 RESULTS (2-10)

Aug. 31	Eastern Michigan	L	14-28
Sept. 7	at Toledo	L	23-38
Sept. 14	at Buffalo	L	3-34
Sept. 21	Central Connecticut St.	W	35-31
Sept. 28	at Miami (Ohio) (ot)	L	20-23
Oct. 5	at Northern Illinois	L	20-34
Oct. 12	Missouri	L	3-45
Oct. 26	Wagner	W	35-7
Nov. 2	at Mississippi State	L	20-45
Nov. 16	Liberty (ot)	L	34-35
Nov. 23	at Georgia	L	21-59
Nov. 30	UConn	L	42-47

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Temple
Sept. 6	Bryant
Sept. 13	at Iowa
Sept. 27	at Missouri
Oct. 4	Western Michigan
Oct. 11	at Kent State
Oct. 18	Buffalo
Oct. 25	at Central Michigan
Nov. 4	at Akron
Nov. 12	Northern Illinois
Nov. 18	at Ohio
Nov. 25	Bowling Green

TOP 9 RECRUITS*

1.	Dinos Drossos, LB	★★★
2.	Jax Markovich, TE	★★★
3.	Gavin Wilson, OT	★★★
4.	AJ Azuakolam Jr., S	★★★
5.	Zach Lawrence, QB	★★★
6.	Jahmale Clark, CB	★★★
7.	Garrett Cooper, OT	★★★
8.	Elijah Pedro, ATH	★★★
9.	Elijah Faulkner, RB	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joe Harasymiak • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 20-15 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator:Mike Bajakian • Defensive Coordinator: Jared Keyte • Location: Amherst, Mass. • Stadium: Warren McGuirk Alumni Stadium (17,000)

WESTERN MICHIGAN BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 119 | MAC PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 5-3 MAC

OFFENSE It will be a new-look offense in more ways than one for Western Michigan in 2025. Only two starters are back from a unit that ranked fifth in the MAC with 370 yards per game. Broc Lowry (Hayden Wolff's backup in 2024) and junior-college transfer Brady Jones are dual-threat QBs who will battle it out for the starting job in August. Jalen Buckley, the 2023 MAC Freshman of the Year, takes over as RB1 after gaining 683 yards last season while battling through an ankle injury, and Cole Cabana has transferred in from Michigan.

Western Michigan must replace two first-team All-MAC picks on the offensive line. Left tackle Adam Vandervest was supposed to start last season but tore his ACL. He is back. Michigan transfer Raheem Anderson II will take over at center.

Wide receiver is another position that will see plenty of new faces. Georgia Tech transfer Christian Leary, who beat Miami (Fla.) with a last-second, 44-yard touchdown in 2023, will be counted on, and Georgia State transfer Talique Williams is a newcomer to watch.

DEFENSE Tackles Mason Nelson and Isaiah Green were critical portal losses, but Tyson Lee is back at one end, and Popeye Williams and Rodney McGraw are in a strong rotation at the other.

The linebackers are thin on experience, and the staff may look to add through the transfer portal over the summer. Former Purdue transfer Domanick Moon should take over at middle linebacker after serving as a reserve last season. Dillon Moore, a speedy junior, will get his chance with all three starters gone from last year.

Second-team All-MAC performer Tate Hallock and Aaron Wofford return at safety. Hallock was second on the team with 84 tackles and led the unit with four interceptions. Wofford is the team's second-leading returning tackler behind Hallock and had a team-leading three forced fumbles last season. Transfers Jordon Thomas (FCS Eastern Kentucky) and Jarvarius Sims (UConn) are set to take over at corner.

SPECIALISTS Sophomore Ryan Millmore returns as punter after averaging a MAC-worst 40.3 yards per kick. The kicker will be Palmer Domschke, who was injured for part of 2024 but started in 2022 and 2023 and is 22-for-35 on field-goal attempts in his career with a long of 52 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS The goal is to return to a bowl game for the second straight year under head coach Lance Taylor. The key will be to establish a running game early behind a rebuilt offensive line in order to give the new quarterback time to adjust to the MAC. Defensively, the pieces are there to finish in the top third of the league if the linebackers step up.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 5-3 MAC)

Aug. 30	at Wisconsin	L	14-28
Sept. 7	at Ohio State	L	0-56
Sept. 14	Bethune-Cookman	W	59-31
Sept. 28	at Marshall	L	20-27
Oct. 5	at Ball State	W	45-42
Oct. 12	Akron	W	34-24
Oct. 19	at Buffalo	W	48-41
Oct. 26	Kent State	W	52-21
Nov. 6	Northern Illinois	L	28-42
Nov. 12	at Bowling Green	L	13-31
Nov. 19	at Central Michigan	L	14-16
Nov. 30	Eastern Michigan	W	26-18
Dec. 14	vs. South Alabama #	L	23-30

#Salute to Veterans Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Michigan State
Sept. 6	North Texas
Sept. 13	at Illinois
Sept. 20	Toledo
Sept. 27	Rhode Island
Oct. 4	at UMass
Oct. 11	Ball State
Oct. 25	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 1	Central Michigan
Nov. 11	Ohio
Nov. 18	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 25	at Eastern Michigan

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Spencer Beckeman, OT	★★★
2.	John Peters, CB	★★★
3.	Tavarez Edwards, S	★★★
4.	Camden Thompson, WR	★★★
5.	Liam Vaughan, IOL	★★★
6.	Warren Cain, EDGE	★★★
7.	KJ Kotalik, OT	★★★
8.	Aveion Chenault, WR	★★★
9.	Gian Carter, EDGE	★★★
10.	Brady Rhoad, TE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Taylor • Record at School: 10-15 (2 years)
Career Record: 10-15 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Walt Bell
Defensive Coordinator: Chris O'Leary • Location: Kalamazoo, Mich.
Stadium: Waldo Stadium (36,361)

JALEN BUCKLEY

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"The overall level of talent has increased under [Lance] Taylor, but they haven't clicked yet. They have to find a new quarterback, but if the transfer back from Michigan [Cole Cabana] can stay healthy, this could be a really good offense, even with a lot of turnover. He's a legit star and could break out against the defenses in our league. ... The defense is living and dying with the portal, so it's hard to gauge if they're improving. The secondary is probably their strength going into the season. ... The staff has turned over a good bit since Taylor started. That's not necessarily Taylor's fault when you're losing guys to a Power 2 program, but it's harder to absorb when you're trying to set the tone for culture and team identity as a first-time head coach."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	17	**MALIQUE DIEUDONNE (SR.)**	82	Terence Marshall (So.)
WR	1	Christian Leary (Sr.)	3	Baylin Brooks (So.)
WR	0	Talique Williams (Sr.)	14	Keivin Boone-Nelson II (Jr.)
LT	71	Adam Vandervest (Sr.)	66	Conor Kenzinger (So.)
LG	51	John Hofer (Sr.)	55	Jack Parker (So.)
C	62	Raheem Anderson II (Sr.)	65	Jeremy Schleicher (So.)
RG	77	Hunter Whitenack (Jr.)	76	Chad Schuster (Jr.)
RT	73	Zach Vaughan (Sr.)	72	Gavin Dabo (So.)
TE	86	**BLAKE BOSMA (SR.)**	7	Mareyohn Hrabowski (Sr.)
QB	14	Broc Lowry (So.)	10	Brady Jones (Jr.)
RB	6	Jalen Buckley (Jr.)	4	Cole Cabana (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	2	Popeye Williams (Jr.)	99	Rodney McGraw (Sr.)
DT	90	Dorian Wesley (Sr.)	98	Dakari Frazier (So.)
DT	91	Marcel Tyler (Sr.)	96	Dalton Gustwiller (So.)
DE	58	**TYSON LEE (SR.)**	93	Kershawn Fisher (Sr.)
OLB	12	Dillon Moore (Jr.)	41	Maddux Babin (Fr.)
MLB	47	Domanick Moon (Jr.)	26	Huston Eubank (So.)
OLB	9	James Camden (Sr.)	45	Andrew Baker (Fr.)
CB	13	Jordon Thomas (Sr.)	21	Joshua Franklin (Jr.)
CB	14	Jarvarius Sims (Jr.)	7	Isaiah Paul (Sr.)
SS	3	**TATE HALLOCK (SR.)**	18	Micah Davis (So.)
FS	5	**AARON WOFFORD (SR.)**	25	Joey Pope (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Palmer Domschke (Sr.)	KR	1	Christian Leary (Sr.)
P	25	Ryan Millmore (So.)	PR	0	Talique Williams (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MICKEY WELSH / ADVERTISER

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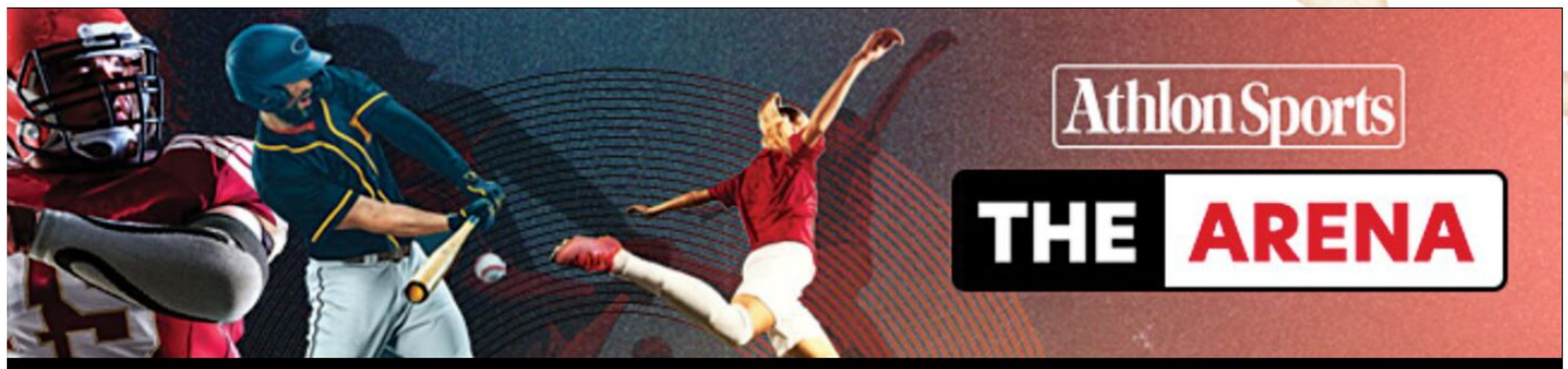

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MWC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	BOISE STATE	BRONCOS
2	UNLV	REBELS
3	SAN JOSÉ STATE	SPARTANS
4	FRESNO STATE	BULLDOGS
5	COLORADO STATE	RAMS
6	AIR FORCE	FALCONS
7	HAWAI'I	RAINBOW WARRIORS
8	SAN DIEGO STATE	AZTECS
9	WYOMING	COWBOYS
10	UTAH STATE	AGGIES
11	NEVADA	WOLF PACK
12	NEW MEXICO	LOBOS

MWC CHAMPIONSHIP

BOISE STATE OVER UNLV

ALL-MWC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	MADDUX MADSEN	Boise State
RB	JAI'DEN THOMAS	UNLV
RB	SCOTTRE HUMPHREY	New Mexico
AP	SIRE GAINES	Boise State
WR	POFELE ASHLOCK	Hawai'i
WR	NICK CENACLE	Hawai'i
WR	MATTHEW COLEMAN	San José State
TE	MATT LAUTER	Boise State
C	JACK WALSH	Wyoming
OL	KAGE CASEY	Boise State
OL	AARON KARAS	Colorado State
OL	COSTEN COOLEY	Air Force
OL	RICHARD PEARCE	New Mexico

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	JAYDEN VIRGIN-MORGAN	Boise State
DL	TREY WHITE	San Diego State
DL	BRAXTON FELY	Boise State
DL	PAYTON ZDROIK	Air Force
DL	ELIJAH ROBINSON	Hawai'i
LB	MARCO NOTARAINNI	Boise State
LB	JORDAN POLLARD	San José State
LB	TANO LETULI	San Diego State
CB	A'MARION McCOY	Boise State
CB	AL'ZILLION HAMILTON	Fresno State
S	TY BENEFIELD	Boise State
S	PETER MANUMA	Hawai'i

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	GABRIEL PLASCENCIA	San Diego State
P	LUKE FREER	Air Force
KR	ABRAHAM WILLIAMS	New Mexico
PR	MARCUS BELLON	Nevada

BOWL PROJECTIONS

LA: UNLV vs. Colorado

Famous Idaho Potato: Colorado State vs. Ohio

Hawai'i: Hawai'i vs. Liberty

Armed Forces: Air Force vs. UTSA

New Mexico: Fresno State vs. Texas State

Arizona: San José State vs. Northern Illinois

College Football Playoff First Round: Boise State vs. Ohio State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

BOISE STATE
Offense: New: Matt Miller, Nate Potter
Old: Dirk Koetter, Nate Potter

COLORADO STATE
Defense: New: Tyson Summers
Old: Freddie Banks

FRESNO STATE
Offense: New: Josh Davis
Old: Pat McCann
Defense: New: Nick Benedetto
Old: Kevin Coyle

HAWAI'I
Offense: New: Anthony Arceneaux
Old: Dan Morrison

NEVADA
Offense: New: David Gilbertson
Old: Matt Lubick

NEW MEXICO
Offense: New: Luke Schleusner
Old: Jason Beck
Defense: New: Spence Nowinsky
Old: Nick Howell

SAN DIEGO STATE
Offense: New: Matt Johnson
Old: Sean Lewis
Defense: New: Rob Aurich
Old: Eric Schmidt

UNLV
Offense: New: Corey Dennis
Old: Brennan Marion
Defense: New: Paul Guenther
Old: Mike Scherer

UTAH STATE
Offense: New: Kevin McGiven
Old: Kyle Cefalo
Defense: New: Nick Howell
Old: Nate Dreiling

SPENCE NOWINSKY, NEW MEXICO

MADDUX MADSEN, BOISE STATE

SCOTTRE HUMPHREY, NEW MEXICO

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Scottre Humphrey	RB	New Mexico	Montana State
	Humphrey, an FCS All-American, should stand out in the Lobos' new-look offense.			
2.	Anthony Colandrea	QB	UNLV	Virginia
	Colandrea headlines an intriguing quarterback room for new head coach Dan Mullen.			
3.	E.J. Warner	QB	Fresno State	Rice
	A three-year starter, Warner is plenty experienced, though turnovers are a concern.			
4.	JaQues Evans	LB	Colorado State	Baylor
	Evans is three years removed from All-Conference USA Honors.			
5.	Keagan Johnson	WR	New Mexico	Kansas State
	His FBS experience should make him a focal point of the offense in Albuquerque.			
6.	JoJo Earle	WR	UNLV	TCU
	The one-time blue-chip prospect rounds out a veteran receiver room full of new arrivals.			
7.	Malik Sherrod	RB	Boise State	Fresno State
	There's no replacing Ashton Jeanty, but Sherrod's arrival helps fill that massive void.			
8.	Noah Avinger	CB	Utah State	New Mexico
	Adding Avinger is a step toward improving the pass defense.			
9.	Jayden Denegal	QB	San Diego State	Michigan
	Denegal rarely saw the field in Ann Arbor but will vie for the starting job.			
10.	Dion Washington	DL	Boise State	Hawai'i
	Washington, another Mountain West transfer, beefs up the Broncos' defensive front.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Boise State (70)	5. Nevada (92)	9. Colorado State (118)
2. San Diego State (76)	6. Fresno State (96)	10. Hawai'i (121)
3. UNLV (82)	7. Utah State (97)	11. New Mexico (123)
4. Wyoming (90)	8. San José State (114)	12. Air Force (124)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 20	Boise State at Air Force
Oct. 4	Boise State at Notre Dame
Oct. 18	Wyoming at Air Force
Oct. 18	UNLV at Boise State
Oct. 25	Utah State at New Mexico
Oct. 25	Colorado State at Wyoming
Oct. 25	Boise State at Nevada
Oct. 25	San Diego State at Fresno St.
Nov. 8	Air Force at San José State
Nov. 29	Nevada at UNLV
Nov. 29	Air Force at Colorado State
Nov. 29	Fresno State at San José St.

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Kamran Williams	RB	UNLV	★★★	420
2.	Harold Duvall	WR	Fresno State	★★★	592
3.	Jaylen Webb	S	Boise State	★★★	35*
4.	Jaden Williams	EDGE	Boise State	★★★	796
5.	Cannon Valenzuela	LB	Colorado State	★★★	809
6.	Ja'Bree Bickham	CB	Boise State	★★★	881
7.	Greg Ard	RB	Boise State	★★★	906
8.	Mumu Bin-Wahad	CB	UNLV	★★★	53*
9.	Deion DeBlanc	WR	Wyoming	★★★	953
10.	Quandarius Keyes	CB	UNLV	★★★	56*

*Rankings per On3 industry ranking; *Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

FROM LEFT: JONAH DYLAN/COMMERCIAL APPEAL; MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES; C. MORGAN ENGEL/NCAA PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

AIR FORCE FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 84 | MWC PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-4 MWC

OFFENSE Due to attrition at the quarterback position, junior Josh Johnson took the majority of snaps in the spring. Quentin Hayes, the 2024 starter, is not returning.

Dylan Carson will man the all-important fullback position again after leading the team with 138 carries and 600 yards; he also scored five touchdowns. Owen Allen (77-335) will serve as FB2, and behind him will be Terrece Gist (40-159). Neither of those two had a single carry for a loss all season as the fullback position as a whole accounted for 255 carries. At running back, Kade Frew averaged 5.8 yards on his 45 attempts, and his backup will be Tylor Latham, who was in the rotation last season.

Wide receiver Cade Harris is back after leading the team with 23 catches for 368 yards, and he also had 48 carries out of Air Force's option attack. Wide receiver Quin Smith and tight end Bruin Fleischmann also return.

The offensive line welcomes back three starters. Center Costen Cooley was an honorable mention All-Mountain West pick and will be a candidate for all-conference honors. The line should again be a strength.

DEFENSE Payton Zdroik will start for a fourth season at nose tackle. He is a talented veteran who should set the tone for the unit. Daniel Grobe started seven games at end and will also be counted on to step up.

The linebackers will essentially be all new for the Falcons. Luke Fisher (one start) and Blake Fletcher (five starts) gained experience last season, and Jackson Adams (three starts), who led the team in QB hurries despite seeing action in only nine games, will join them. The SPUR position, a hybrid safety/linebacker spot, falls to sophomore Nick Beckwith.

Air Force allowed only 188.5 passing yards per game last season, but the starting corners are gone, and there will be a battle in August to see who earns those roles. Kyle Chen and Houston Hendrix have the inside track at safety, with Korey Johson and Evan Rau also in the mix.

SPECIALISTS Reagan Tubbs takes over as the placekicker after serving as the kickoff specialist in 2024. Luke Freer will be the punter after averaging 47.5 yards per punt last year, which would have led the league and ranked fifth nationally had he qualified.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Falcons finished 2024 on a four-game winning streak. A bowl game is the goal for head coach Troy Calhoun's team, although there were plenty of questions on defense at the conclusion of spring practice. The offense has potential if Johnson emerges as a solid answer at the quarterback position.

DYLAN CARSON

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"They're going to be the team from the back end of the schedule last year, not the front end. They took their lumps, turning over a lot of guys on both sides. That '23 team was really deep and older. Last year they were teaching more than coaching. That's what good staffs do, because they came on strong after that losing streak and found their guys for the next run. ... They have a solid backfield again; if [Dylan] Carson stays healthy, he'll be the leader of that group. The quarterback play needs to improve, though. ... Defensively, they don't seem to have a lot — there's one really strong defensive lineman [Payton Zdroik] that's a great player. They're not a top-end roster for this league, but they're still in progress. They should be bowling this year."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (6)		
WR	21	**CADE HARRIS (SR.)**	19	Grant Wayne (Jr.)
WR	18	Quin Smith (Sr.)	10	Tre Roberson (Sr.)
LT	78	**TREVOR TATE (SR.)**	63	Gage Spencer (Jr.)
LG	75	**ALEC FALK (JR.)**	58	TJ Tarascio (Jr.)
C	67	**COSTEN COOLEY (SR.)**	57	Gabriel Averitt (Sr.)
RG	66	Jace Sutulovich (Sr.)	72	Jon Ashford (So.)
RT	52	Nathan Elwood (Jr.)	65	Samuel Floysand (Sr.)
TE	88	**BRUIN FLEISCHMANN (SR.)**	87	Parker Menefee (Sr.)
QB	11	Josh Johnson (Jr.)	9	Liam Szarka (So.)
RB	8	Kade Frew (Sr.)	25	Tylor Latham (Sr.)
FB	5	**DYLAN CARSON (SR.)**	22	Owen Allen (Jr.)
		DEFENSE (3)		
DE	99	**AIDAN SWARTZ (SR.)**	10	Jack Curtis (Sr.)
NT	96	**PAYTON ZDROIK (SR.)**	55	Jayden Oquendo (Jr.)
DE	95	**DANIEL GROBE (SR.)**	91	Lukia Rawls Jr. (Jr.)
LB	58	Jackson Adams (Sr.)	43	Chances Carter-Hill (Sr.)
LB	48	Luke Fisher (Jr.)	33	Brody Bujnoch (Jr.)
LB	41	Blake Fletcher (Jr.)	32	Dallas Daley (Jr.)
SPUR	26	Nick Beckwith (So.)	29	Jaris McIntosh (Jr.)
CB	9	Levi Brown (Sr.)	23	Jet Wiley (Jr.)
CB	15	Korey Johnson (So.)	9	TJ Barker (So.)
SS	20	Kyle Chen (Jr.)	15	Korey Johnson (So.)
FS	19	Houston Hendrix (Jr.)	13	Evan Rau (Sr.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	96	Reagan Tubbs (Sr.)	KR	21 Cade Harris (So.)
P	97	Luke Freer (Sr.)	PR	21 Cade Harris (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-4 MWC)

Aug. 31	Merrimack	W	21-6
Sept. 7	San José State	L	7-17
Sept. 14	at Baylor	L	3-31
Sept. 28	at Wyoming	L	19-31
Oct. 5	Navy	L	7-34
Oct. 12	at New Mexico	L	37-52
Oct. 19	Colorado State	L	13-21
Nov. 2	at Army	L	3-20
Nov. 9	Fresno State	W	36-28
Nov. 16	Oregon State	W	28-0
Nov. 23	at Nevada	W	22-19
Nov. 30	at San Diego State	W	31-20

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Bucknell
Sept. 13	at Utah State
Sept. 20	Boise State
Sept. 27	Hawai'i
Oct. 4	at Navy
Oct. 11	at UNLV
Oct. 18	Wyoming
Nov. 1	Army
Nov. 8	at San José State
Nov. 15	at UConn
Nov. 22	New Mexico
Nov. 29	at Colorado State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

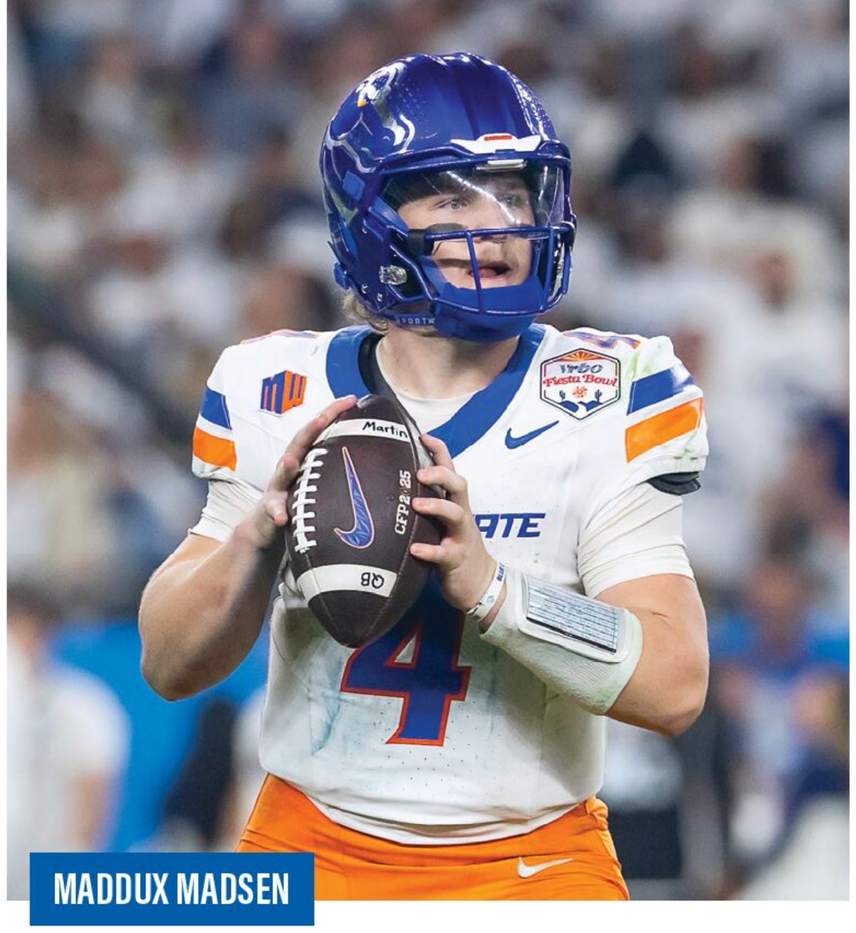
1.	Michael Bruggers, EDGE	★★★
2.	Connor Mathews, RB	★★★
3.	Julius Moss, ATH	★★★
4.	Andrew Jurasek, LB	★★★
5.	Sean Murphy, IOL	★★★
6.	Jax Murphy, IOL	★★★
7.	Connor Vasek, EDGE	★★★
8.	Jake Sulzberger, OT	★★★
9.	Colt Hodges, EDGE	★★★
10.	Bryce Braden, LB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Troy Calhoun • Record at School: 135-89 (18 years) • Career Record: 135-89 (18 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Thiessen • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Knorr • Location: Colorado Springs, Colo. • Stadium: Falcon Stadium (39,441)

DANNY WILD-IMAGN IMAGES



MADDUX MADSEN

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"They're the standard of the league and will be the best program in the new Pac-12 as well. ... They're replacing a generational talent at running back; that's obvious. The focus is going to be on the quarterback, who wasn't asked to do much with [Ashton] Jeanty in the backfield. They're confident in him, but he's never shown up as a big-time, big-throw guy. He has to take that step up if they want to go back to the playoff. ... They have a really experienced, really talented offensive line. Defensively, they look more athletic than most of the programs in this league. They've got a lot of nice pieces in the secondary. I think they'll be aggressive shopping for wide receivers. The biggest question is the quarterback. It's all on him."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)				
WR	81	Austin Bolt (Sr.)	82	Ben Ford (Sr.)
WR	**3**	**LATRELL CAPLES (SR.)**	13	Chase Penry (Sr.)
WR	5	Chris Marshall (Jr.)	80	Cameron Bates (So.)
LT	**77**	**KAGE CASEY (JR.)**	71	Miles Walker (So.)
LG	68	Jake Steele (Jr.)	67	Jason Steele (So.)
C	**63**	**MASON RANDOLPH (SR.)**	**72**	**ZACH HOLMES (SR.)**
RG	62	Roger Carreon (Jr.)	**78**	**TYLER KEINATH (SR.)**
RT	**65**	**HALL SCHMIDT (JR.)**	75	Daylon Metoyer (Jr.)
TE	**85**	**MATT LAUTER (SR.)**	**88**	**MATT WAGNER (SO.)**
QB	**4**	**MADDUX MADSEN (JR.)**	14	Max Cutforth (So.)
RB	26	Sire Gaines (Fr.)	1	Jambres Dubar (Jr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	**5**	**JAYDEN VIRGIN-MORGAN (JR.)**	43	Jake Ripp (Jr.)
DT	19	Dion Washington (Sr.)	92	David Latu (Jr.)
DT	**90**	**BRAXTON FELY (SR.)**	94	Keanu Mailoto (Sr.)
DE	95	Max Stege (Jr.)	15	Malakai Williams (Sr.)
LB	53	Marco Notarainni (Sr.)	17	Clay Martineau (So.)
LB	22	Chase Martin (Jr.)	43	Jake Ripp (Jr.)
CB	**7**	**A'MARION MCCOY (SR.)**	14	Demetrius Freeney (Jr.)
CB	**6**	**JEREMIAH EARBY (SR.)**		Jaden Mickey (Jr.)
NB	20	Davon Banks (Sr.)	18	Samuel Brooks (Jr.)
S	**21**	**ZION WASHINGTON (SR.)**	38	Travis Anderson (Fr.)
S	**0**	**TY BENEFIELD (JR.)**	25	Jaylen Webb (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Colton Boomer (Sr.)	**KR**	24 Dylan Riley (So.)
P		Evan Kiely (Jr.)	**PR**	3 Latrell Caples (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BOISE STATE BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 25 | MWC PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 12-2, 7-0 MWC

OFFENSE Boise State still has the makings of a potent offense even without do-everything running back Ashton Jeanty. Quarterback Maddux Madsen returns after throwing for 3,018 yards and 23 touchdowns. Madsen completed 62 percent of his passes with only six interceptions.

Madsen's receivers will be some of the MWC's best. Former Texas A&M receiver Chris Marshall, who missed most of last season with injuries, has all-conference potential. Latrell Caples returns in the slot, and tight end Matt Lauter (47-619-7) has one more season before heading to the NFL.

Sire Gaines should be RB1 after flashing as a true freshman with 110 yards on 12 carries in last season's opener. He hurt his ankle in Week 3 and never returned, but he is primed for a big season in what should be a run-first offense again. Jambres Dubar will also see a number of carries.

Up front, Boise returns both tackles, as well as two other linemen who were projected starters last season but missed the majority of the year with injuries. Left tackle Kage Casey is the best of the bunch.

DEFENSE Defensive end Jayden Virgin-Morgan will look to build on a 10-sack season that earned him first-team All-Mountain West honors. He will be supported on the outside by Max Stege, who is improving rapidly, along with former linebacker Jake Ripp and All-Big Sky FCS Idaho transfer Malakai Williams. On the interior, second-team All-MWC defensive tackle Braxton Fely returns, and Boise also brought in transfers from Arizona (Keanu Mailoto), Hawai'i (Dion Washington) and BYU (David Latu).

In the Broncos' 4-2-5 alignment, veteran linebacker Marco Notarainni, who was first-team All-MWC last season, is a heady playmaker.

Four starters return in a secondary that allowed 241.4 passing yards per game in 2024 (106th in the FBS). Corner A'Marion McCoy and safety Ty Benefield will be the leaders. Notre Dame transfer Jaden Mickey and Arizona transfer Demetrius Freeney could play their way into the rotation.

SPECIALISTS Colton Boomer is transferring to Boise State from UCF for his final season. In 2023, Boomer hit four of his field goals including a walk-off 40-yarder in an 18-16 UCF win at Boise. Punter James Ferguson-Reynolds transferred, leaving the Broncos searching for a replacement.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Spencer Danielson pulled off a dream season in 2024, and his Broncos are set up for success once again. Gaines appears to have the goods to keep the run game productive, and Madsen has proven to be a capable passer. The defense should improve its numbers. An October road trip to Notre Dame will be a highlight and measuring stick.

2024 RESULTS (12-2, 7-0 MWC)

Aug. 31	at Georgia Southern	W	56-45
Sept. 7	at Oregon	L	34-37
Sept. 21	Portland State	W	56-14
Sept. 28	Washington State	W	45-24
Oct. 5	Utah State	W	62-30
Oct. 12	at Hawai'i	W	28-7
Oct. 25	at UNLV	W	29-24
Nov. 1	San Diego State	W	56-24
Nov. 9	Nevada	W	28-21
Nov. 16	at San José State	W	42-21
Nov. 23	at Wyoming	W	17-13
Nov. 29	Oregon State	W	34-18
Dec. 6	UNLV #	W	21-7
Dec. 31	vs. Penn State %	L	14-31

#MW Championship %Fiesta Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at South Florida
Sept. 6	E. Washington
Sept. 20	at Air Force
Sept. 27	Appalachian State
Oct. 4	at Notre Dame
Oct. 11	New Mexico
Oct. 18	UNLV
Oct. 25	at Nevada
Nov. 1	Fresno State
Nov. 15	at San Diego State
Nov. 22	Colorado State
Nov. 29	at Utah State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ja'Bree Bickham, CB	★★★
2.	Bethel Imasuen, DL	★★★
3.	Greg Ard, RB	★★★
4.	Jaylen Webb, S	★★★
5.	Josiah Alanis, S	★★★
6.	Gavin Packer, WR	★★★
7.	Jacob Tracy, OT	★★★
8.	Markell Bowens, EDGE	★★★
9.	Jaden Williams, EDGE	★★★
10.	Tahj Crutchfield, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Spencer Danielson • Record at School: 15-3 (1+ years)
Career Record: 15-3 (1+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Nate Potter
Defensive Coordinator: Eric Chinander • Location: Boise, Idaho
Stadium: Albertsons Stadium (36,387)

COLORADO STATE RAMS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 83 | MWC PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 6-1 MWC

OFFENSE Colorado State went run-heavy last season, but this year, head coach Jay Norvell wants to open up the offense, and he has the veteran quarterback to do it. Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi will start for the third straight season and should compete for All-Mountain West honors.

Tulsa transfer Lloyd Avant was the most impressive back in the spring and will get a chance to start. Justin Marshall shared the rushing load last season with Avery Morrow and gained 746 yards and scored four touchdowns. Jalen Dupree is the third back and has solid experience.

Wide receiver Armani Winfield (38 receptions, 341 yards, two touchdowns) was the leading pass-catcher last season, and he's back to play on the outside. The spring was spent sorting through who join him in the rotation. Sophomores Jordan Ross and Tommy Maher are inexperienced but were productive in the spring. FCS Northern Arizona transfer Tay Lanier also turned heads. At tight end, Jaxxon Warren and Rocky Beers should form a strong 1-2 tandem.

Two starters are back along the offensive line in right tackle Aaron Karas and left guard Tanner Morley, who are both all-league candidates.

DEFENSE Senior Mukendi Wa-Kalonji returns at end after recording 5.5 tackles for a loss and 2.5 sacks last season. A combination of Andrew Laurich, Gabe Jones and Jernias Tafia will man the two inside positions. Redshirt freshmen Keegan Shank and Jack Moran provide depth.

Big things are expected from outside linebacker JaQues Evans, a Baylor transfer. Evans is already a team leader. Iowa State transfer Jacob Eillis has good speed and should also have a big impact.

Free safety Ayden Hector, who is in his fourth season with the Rams, will lead the secondary. The other safety will be new. Redshirt freshman AJ Noland made a strong impression in the spring and worked his way into the starting lineup. Jahari Rogers, Lemondre Joe, CJ Blocker and Dylan Phelps are fighting for the starting corner spots.

SPECIALISTS Bryan Hansen has handled kickoffs at Colorado State, but he also had nine punts in 2024 for a 41.1 average and is in line to take over punting duties. At kicker, Payne Williams III, Luke Watkins and Dylan Freebury all competed in the spring to replace Jordan Noyes.

FINAL ANALYSIS Colorado State finished tied for second in the Mountain West last season with UNLV, and Norvell has said the goal is to reach the championship game before the Rams move to the re-formed Pac-12 in 2026. The offense should certainly improve on its 24.4 points per game from a year ago. The defense is almost all new, so how that unit comes together will really determine if CSU can be a factor again in the MW race.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 6-1 MWC)

Aug. 31	at Texas	L	0-52
Sept. 7	Northern Colorado	W	38-17
Sept. 14	Colorado	L	9-28
Sept. 21	UTEP	W	27-17
Oct. 5	at Oregon State (ot)	L	31-39
Oct. 12	San José State	W	31-24
Oct. 19	at Air Force	W	21-13
Oct. 26	New Mexico	W	17-6
Nov. 2	at Nevada	W	38-21
Nov. 15	Wyoming	W	24-10
Nov. 23	at Fresno State	L	22-28
Nov. 29	Utah State	W	42-37
Dec. 28	vs. Miami (Ohio) #	L	17-43

#Arizona Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Washington
Sept. 6	Northern Colorado
Sept. 20	UTSA
Sept. 27	Washington State
Oct. 4	at San Diego State
Oct. 11	Fresno State
Oct. 18	Hawai'i
Oct. 25	at Wyoming
Nov. 8	UNLV
Nov. 15	at New Mexico
Nov. 22	at Boise State
Nov. 29	Air Force

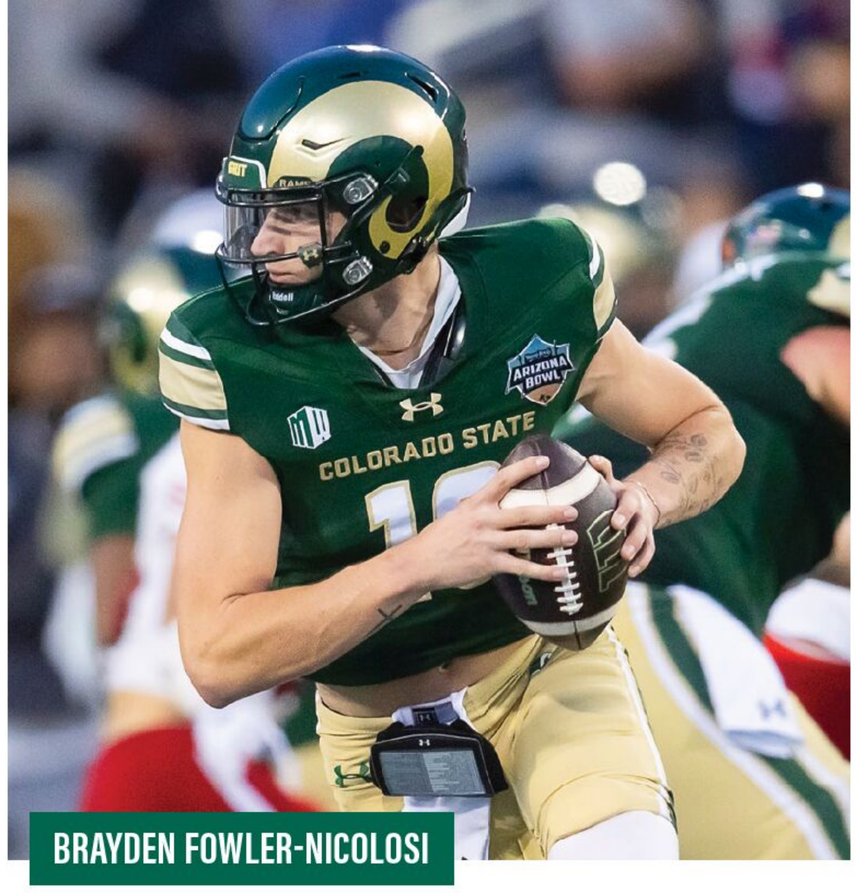
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cannon Valenzuela, LB	★★★
2.	D'Angelo Hagans Jr., S	★★★
2.	Caden Branston, DL	★★★
3.	Antoine Martin Jr., WR	★★★
4.	John Smith, ATH	★★★
5.	Clarence Taylor, WR	★★★
6.	Kentez Allen, IOL	★★★
7.	Jackson Murray, DL	★★★
8.	Sione Netane, IOL	★★★
9.	Brock Camp, ATH	★★★
10.	Javion Kinnard, ATH	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Norvell • Record at School: 16-21 (3 years) • Career Record: 49-47 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Matt Mumme, Bill Best Defensive Coordinator: Tyson Summers • Location: Fort Collins, Colo. Stadium: Canvas Stadium (41,000)



BRAYDEN FOWLER-NICOLOSI

SCOUTING THE RAMS

"They didn't get a lot of national attention because of what Boise and UNLV were doing, but they were 6-1 in Mountain West play. The expectations are always high for these guys, and if the quarterback play continues, they could make a run at it this year. He [QB Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi] is a legit playmaker, and it seems like he's getting better with his decision-making. They slowed it down a bit on offense last year and grinded some, and he benefited from that. ... They lost a lot of solid players on defense, so there's some questions there. ... Depending on how well they make out in transfers and build out some wide receivers to help Fowler-Nicolosi, they could make a run at a conference title this year, but the defense is a legit concern right now."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	**ARMANI WINFIELD (JR.)**	6	Tay Lanier (Sr.)
WR	10	Tommy Maher (So.)	82	Lavon Brown (So.)
WR	0	Jordan Ross (So.)	89	Keynan Higgins (So.)
LT	72	Christian Martin (So.)	69	Alex Foster (Sr.)
LG	**74**	**TANNER MORLEY (SO.)**	60	Chandler Brown (Sr.)
C	57	Trevyn Heil (Sr.)	65	Philip Ocon (Fr.)
RG	79	Aitor Urionabarrenechea (So.)	54	William Wortmann (Sr.)
RT	**78**	**AARON KARAS (JR.)**	63	John Holthaus (Fr.)
TE	19	Jaxxon Warren (So.)	81	Rocky Beers (Sr.)
QB	**16**	**BRAYDEN FOWLER-NICOLOSI (JR.)**	8	Jackson Brousseau (So.)
RB	25	Lloyd Avant (So.)	29	Justin Marshall (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

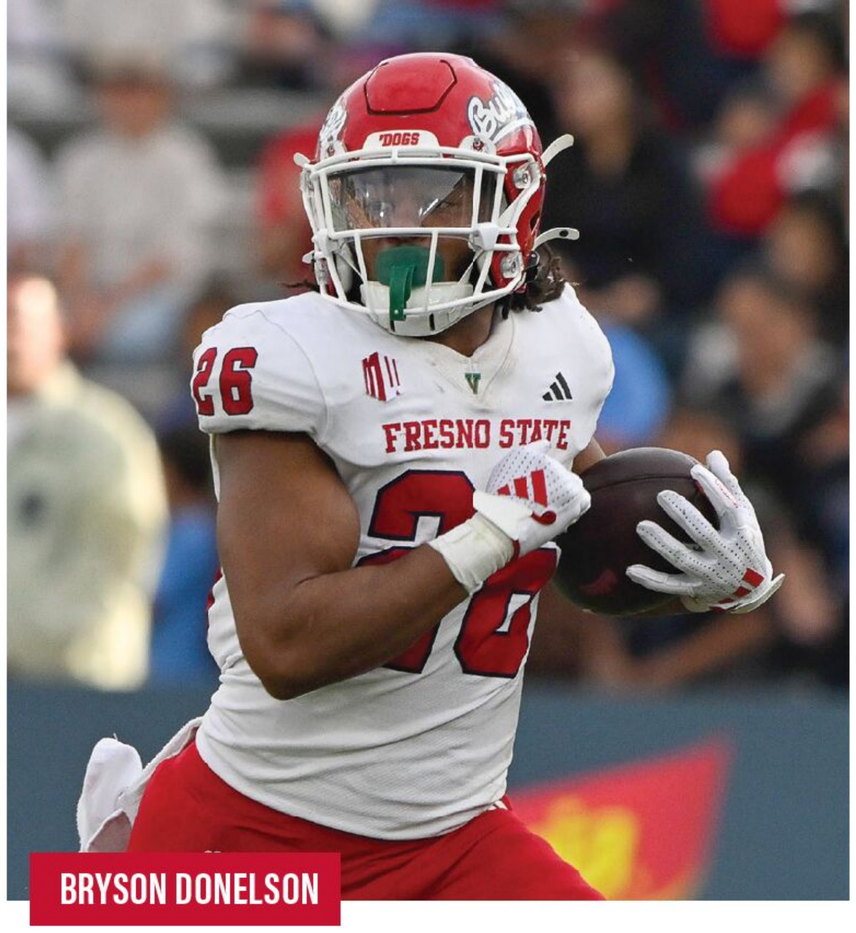
DE	**92**	**MUKENDI WA-KALONJI (SR.)**	91	Moso'oipala Tuitele (Jr.)
NT	49	Jernias Tafia (Sr.)	90	Keegan Shank (Fr.)
DT	55	Andrew Laurich (So.)	95	Gabe Jones (So.)
EDGE	9	JaQues Evans (Sr.)	56	Kenyon Agurs (So.)
LB	44	Jacob Ellis (Sr.)	23	Jaseim Mitchell (Sr.)
LB	40	Owen Long (So.)	45	Robert Edmonson (So.)
CB	7	Lemondre Joe (Sr.)	0	Chris Jackson (Jr.)
CB	4	Jahari Rogers (Sr.)	17	CJ Blocker (So.)
NB	27	Dylan Phelps (So.)	16	Chance Harrison (Fr.)
SS	18	AJ Noland (Fr.)	12	Jace Bellah (Jr.)
FS	15	Ayden Hector (Sr.)	32	Jake Jarmolowich (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Payne Williams III (Fr.)	KR	25	Lloyd Avant (So.)
P	83	Bryan Hansen (Jr.)	PR	10	Tommy Maher (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES



BRYSON DONELSON

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Matt Entz was a near-perfect hire for this program. He gets the Valley culture, and they'll love him once he gets it turned around. They're gonna be simple, no-foolin', line-of-scrimmage-focused with a lot of heavy run. They're gonna run a 4-2-5 defensively. ... They've lost a ton of guys in the coaching change, but replacing [QB Mikey] Keene is the biggest task for them. Don't be shocked if they're shopping for a quarterback in the portal. ... They won't be an overnight success, but they can really succeed long term if they follow that North Dakota State kind of blueprint and work the region in recruiting. They need to win on relationships and recruiting right now."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	85	Josiah Ayon (Sr.)	10	Jordan Malau'ulu (Fr.)
WR	5	Josiah Freeman (Sr.)	11	Jayon Farrar (Jr.)
WR	1	Jahlil McClain (So.)	81	Jordan Brown (Sr.)
LT	71	Rolan Fullwood (Sr.)	58	Marcus Simien (Jr.)
LG	72	Edward Fonua (Jr.)	54	Campbell McHarg (Sr.)
C	**69**	**JACOB SPOMER (SR.)**	56	Ben Baker (Fr.)
RG	74	Julian Polendo (Sr.)	66	Gino Quinones (Sr.)
RT	**77**	**TOREON PENRIGHT (SR.)**	51	Braylan Henderson (Jr.)
TE	**88**	**RICHIE ANDERSON (SO.)**	87	Jake Tarwater (Sr.)
QB	8	E.J. Warner (Sr.)	7	Jayden Mandal (So.)
RB	6	Bryson Donelson (So.)	**33**	**ELIJAH GILLIAM (SR.)**

DEFENSE (3)

DE	**97**	**JAHZON JACKS (JR.)**	54	Sione Noa (Sr.)
DT	8	Martin Owusu (So.)	56	Jairus Satele (Jr.)
DT	91	Auckland Asiata (So.)	99	Ezra Christensen (Sr.)
DE	0	Korey Foreman (Sr.)	19	Finn Claypool (Sr.)
LB	39	Jadon Pearson (Sr.)	25	Justin Johnson (So.)
LB	10	K'vion Thunderbird (So.)	26	Tim Thomas (Jr.)
CB	**3**	**AL'ZILLION HAMILTON (SR.)**	28	Jomarion Briggs (Jr.)
CB	1	Jakari Embry (Sr.)	7	Loyall Mouzon (Fr.)
NB	5	Simeon Harris (Jr.)	23	Andre Cobb (Jr.)
SS	22	Camryn Bracha (Sr.)	4	RL Miller (So.)
FS	**11**	**JAYDEN DAVIS (JR.)**	17	Ethan Tierney (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Dylan Lynch (Sr.)	KR	1	Jahlill McClain (So.)
P	49	Clay Lawrence (So.)	PR	81	Jordan Brown (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ROBERT HANASHIRO-IMAGN IMAGES

FRESNO STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 76 | MWC PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 4-3 MWC

OFFENSE With 70 percent of the offensive production gone and a new coaching staff in place, the Fresno State offense will certainly look different. Transfer E.J. Warner, son of Hall of Famer Kurt Warner, arrives from Rice and should have a leg up on the starting quarterback job ahead of Jayden Mandal. Warner started for two seasons at Temple and one at Rice and has 8,814 career passing yards.

Sophomore Bryson Donelson emerged late last season and should be the primary running back for the Bulldogs. Elijah Gilliam is a change-of-pace option who started last year before Donelson took over.

The wide receiver room has undergone an overhaul. Josiah Freeman has not been able to avoid injuries, but he has breakout potential. Jahlil McClain arrives from Louisville and will likely start. Tight end Richie Anderson has impressed the new coaching staff and started last season as a true freshman. Jake Tarwater should also see some action in double-tight end sets.

The offensive line returns two starters, one of whom — Jacob Spomer — is moving from left tackle to center. Rolan Fullwood replaces Spomer at left tackle At right tackle, Toreon Penright should hold onto his job after starting last season, but he missed spring ball due to injury.

DEFENSE The Fresno State defensive line has talent on the outside in returning starter Jahzon Jacks, former 5-star recruit Korey Foreman and newcomer Finn Claypool. Foreman missed the spring, but he has long had high-end potential that could finally be unlocked in his fifth season in college. The middle of the defensive line is unsettled, with Minnesota transfer Martin Owusu and Auckland Asiata the early leaders.

The Bulldogs lost two veteran starters at linebacker and are turning to the well-traveled Jadon Pearson (five schools) for leadership. Arizona State transfer K'vion Thunderbird has also impressed, and former safety Justin Johnson also figures to be in the rotation.

Cornerback Al'zillion Hamilton entered the portal but returned to Fresno State and is the Bulldogs' No. 1 defender. He lines up next to two safeties — Jayden Davis and Camryn Bracha — who are both solid fits.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Dylan Lynch is 43-for-57 on field goals in his career with just one missed extra point in three seasons. Australian punter Clay Lawrence hopes to add a few yards to his 41-yard average.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Matt Entz arrives after one year as USC's defensive coordinator and five years at FCS North Dakota State, where he won two national championships. He is used to winning, though he may not win right away in Fresno with the severe roster turnover.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 4-3 MWC)

Aug. 31	at Michigan	L	10-30
Sept. 7	Sacramento State	W	46-30
Sept. 14	New Mexico State	W	48-0
Sept. 21	at New Mexico	W	38-21
Sept. 28	at UNLV	L	14-59
Oct. 12	Washington State	L	17-25
Oct. 18	at Nevada	W	24-21
Oct. 26	San José State	W	33-10
Nov. 2	Hawai'i	L	20-21
Nov. 9	at Air Force	L	28-36
Nov. 23	Colorado State	W	28-22
Nov. 30	at UCLA	L	13-20
Dec. 23	vs. No. Illinois # (ot)	L	20-28

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	at Kansas
Aug. 30	Georgia Southern
Sept. 6	at Oregon State
Sept. 13	Southern
Sept. 20	at Hawai'i
Oct. 4	Nevada
Oct. 11	at Colorado State
Oct. 25	San Diego State
Nov. 1	at Boise State
Nov. 15	Wyoming
Nov. 22	Utah State
Nov. 29	at San Jose State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Harold Duvall, WR	★★★
2.	Isaiah Dillon, WR	★★★
3.	Brayden Walton, OT	★★★
4.	Niko Baumgartner, LB	★★★
5.	Jonavon Darrington, WR	★★★
6.	Robert James III, DL	★★★
7.	Keynan Cotton, WR	★★★
8.	Jonah Leaupepetele, IOL	★★★
9.	Brayden Turner, QB	★★★
10.	Jonathan Craft, QB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Entz • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 60-11 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Josh Davis
Defensive Coordinator: Nick Benedetto • Location: Fresno, Calif.
Stadium: Valley Children's Stadium (40,727)

HAWAI'I RAINBOW WARRIORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 98 | MWC PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-4 MWC

OFFENSE Quarterback Micah Alejado gave Hawai'i fans plenty of offseason optimism with his 469-yard, five-TD performance in the 2024 season finale in his first career start. Alejado stands just 5-foot-10 but has a quick release and has shown strong accuracy.

The Hawai'i running game ranked 125th in the nation last season. Top rusher Landon Sims (351 yards) returns, and he brings value in pass-blocking and receiving situations. Cam Barfield, a former Boston College transfer, and Christian Vaughn add potential explosiveness.

Inside receiver Pofele Ashlock could be the Warriors' most talented pass-catcher. He was a Freshman All-American two years ago but battled injuries as a sophomore. Nick Cenacle matched Ashlock with six touchdown catches a year ago and was the team's leader in receiving yards with 721. Stanford transfer Jackson Harris will be a player to watch on the outside.

Three O-line starters return, including right guard Kuao Peihopa, who converted from defensive tackle and started all 12 games in 2024. Both starting tackles are also back, and the other interior positions all have starting experience, though there is a lack of depth.

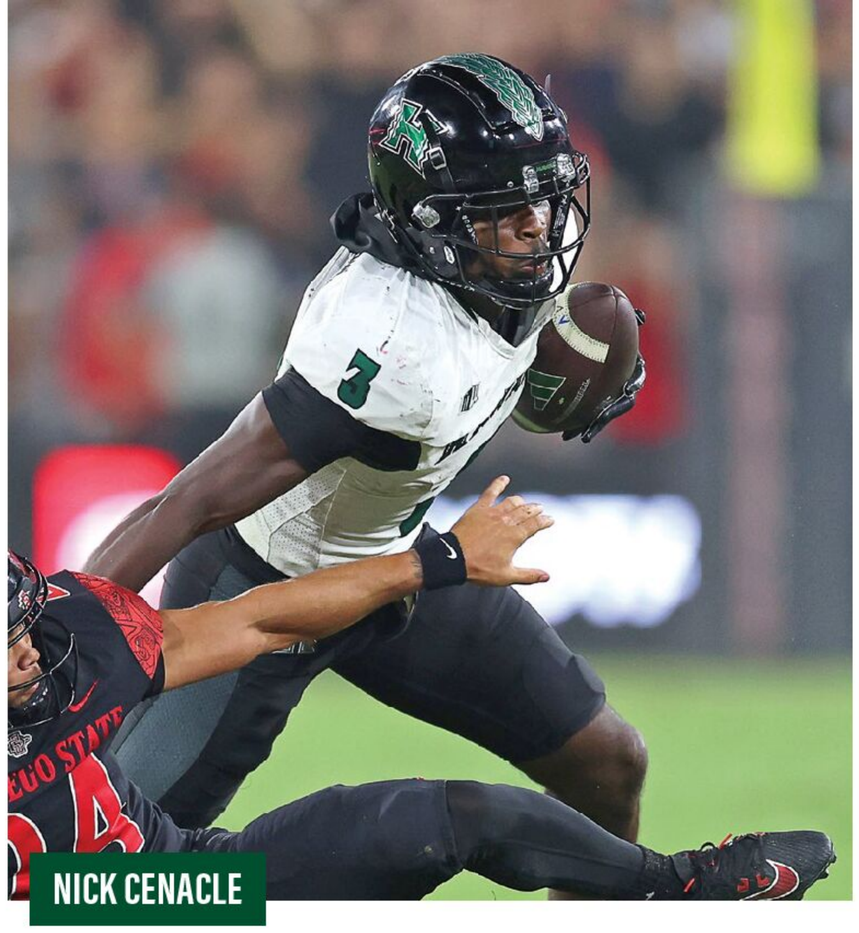
DEFENSE Cornerback Virdel Edwards II missed all of 2024 to injury, but he has a potential NFL future. Both safeties are back in Peter Manuma and Kilinahe Mendiola-Jensen, with Manuma earning honorable mention All-Mountain West honors last year. Nickelback Elijah Palmer also was honorable mention all-league. The other corner spot could be shared by Devyn King and Jaheim Wilson-Jones.

Linebacker also has decent depth, with last season's top two tacklers returning. Jamih Otis is a potential all-league candidate, and veteran Logan Taylor joins him. Jalen Smith will also figure into the rotation.

End Elijah Robinson shared the team lead with 5.0 sacks. He's joined up front by Tariq Jones and Jamar Sekona. Minnesota transfer Luther McCoy impressed in the spring, and former Utah transfer Ka'eo Akana will be in the rotation.

SPECIALISTS Returning kicker Kansei Matsuzawa hit 12-of-16 field goals last year and appeared to hold onto his job in the spring. Punter Lucas Borrow saw his appeal for an additional year of eligibility denied, leaving Hawaii the task of filling that position by August.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Timmy Chang has not made a bowl in his first three seasons at his alma mater. If that is to change, a lot will be on the shoulders of Alejado, who will need to get the offense to the next level. Three non-conference wins and three MWC wins should be the goal.



NICK CENACLE

SCOUTING THE WARRIORS

"All the attention there was on that freshman quarterback [Micah Alejado] who closed out the season against New Mexico. He blew it up against a bad defense, but he's a local kid and gives them something to be really excited about with [Brayden] Schager done. ... They played better on defense last year than in the previous years since Timmy [Chang] came on. I think they're pretty dinged up from the portal, though, so I'm not sure how much carryover you can really expect. ... Timmy took a one-year extension, and he deserves a lot more patience. This is one of the most difficult, unique challenges in FBS, and the portal's made it even harder. If they can break through to a bowl season, it would be huge considering where they started."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	9	Jackson Harris (So.)	11	Karsyn Pupunu (Sr.)
WR	1	Brandon White (Jr.)	89	Nick Delgadillo (So.)
WR	**5**	**POFELE ASHLOCK (JR.)**	82	Tama Uiliata (Fr.)
WR	**3**	**NICK CENACLE (SR.)**	87	Devon Tauaefa (Jr.)
LT	**58**	**ZHEN SOTELO (SR.)**	52	Dean Briski (Jr.)
LG		Tai Marks (Sr.)	79	Judah Kaio (Jr.)
C	57	Ethan Spencer (Jr.)	60	Ricky Wells (Jr.)
RG	**59**	**KUAO PEIHOPA (SR.)**	60	Ricky Wells (Jr.)
RT	**70**	**JAMES MILOVALE (SR.)**	52	Dean Briski (Jr.)
QB	12	Micah Alejado (Fr.)	2	Luke Weaver (Jr.)
RB	**30**	**LANDON SIMS (SR.)**	0	Cam Barfield (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	**5**	**TARIQ JONES (SR.)**	12	Wynden Ho'ohuli (Sr.)
DT	52	Luther McCoy (Sr.)	79	De'Jon Benton (Sr.)
DT	77	Jamar Sekona (Sr.)	91	Josh Sagapolutele (So.)
DE	**0**	**ELIJAH ROBINSON (SR.)**	10	Ka'eo Akana (Jr.)
LB	11	Jamih Otis (Jr.)	3	Jalen Smith (Sr.)
LB	**16**	**LOGAN TAYLOR (SR.)**	49	Tasi Tadio (So.)
CB	24	Devyn King (Sr.)	14	Jaheim Wilson-Jones (Sr.)
CB	**23**	**VIRDEL EDWARDS II (SR.)**	21	Fabian Ross (Jr.)
NB	**4**	**ELIJAH PALMER (JR.)**	25	Matagi Thompson (Jr.)
SS	**1**	**PETER MANUMA (SR.)**	9	Tim Malo (Sr.)
FS	**8**	**KILINAHE MENDIOLA-JENSEN (SR.)**	2	Kona Moore (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Kansei Matsuzawa (Sr.)	KR	0 Cam Barfield (Jr.)
P		TBD	PR	3 Nick Cenacle (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-4 MWC)

Aug. 24	Delaware State	W	35-14
Aug. 31	UCLA	L	13-16
Sept. 14	at Sam Houston	L	13-31
Sept. 21	Northern Iowa	W	36-7
Oct. 5	at San Diego State	L	24-27
Oct. 12	Boise State	L	7-28
Oct. 19	at Washington State	L	10-42
Oct. 26	Nevada	W	34-13
Nov. 2	at Fresno State	W	21-20
Nov. 9	UNLV	L	27-29
Nov. 16	at Utah State	L	10-55
Nov. 30	New Mexico	W	38-30

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 23	Stanford
Aug. 30	at Arizona
Sept. 6	Sam Houston
Sept. 13	Portland State
Sept. 20	Fresno State
Sept. 27	at Air Force
Oct. 11	Utah State
Oct. 18	at Colorado State
Nov. 1	at San José State
Nov. 8	San Diego State
Nov. 22	at UNLV
Nov. 29	Wyoming

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zavier Fairley, CB	★★★
2.	Uluaki Taukiuvea, ATH	★★★
3.	Aisiah Paogofie, LB	★★★
4.	Brandon Gaea, WR	★★★
5.	Jarret Nielsen, QB	★★★
6.	Zaden Mariteragi, LB	★★★
7.	Titan Lacaden, WR	★★★
8.	KJ Hallums, IOL	★★★
9.	Jordan Kernaghan, IOL	★★★
10.	Falelua Moalele, DL	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Timmy Chang • Record at School: 13-25 (3 years) • Career Record: 13-25 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Anthony Arceneaux • Defensive Coordinator: Dennis Thurman • Location: Honolulu, HI • Stadium: Clarence T.C. Ching Athletics Complex (16,909)

ABE ARREDONDO-IMAGN IMAGES

CHUBBA PURDY

MARCO GARCIA-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE WOLF PACK

"This isn't a 3-10 football program, honestly. If you're looking for a surprise this season, I think this might be the program in our league that turns some heads and wins a few games they aren't supposed to. They played most everyone in the league really hard with a roster that wasn't that great. ... If they end up as a surprise, it's because [QB Chubba] Purdy finally gets it all figured out and they can keep him healthy. He's the man there going into fall camps, and he's got the biggest upside of any quarterback they've got. ... They're still flipping that roster over, and there's gonna be a lot of new guys coming in for big spots, but there's a core of guys they can build around if they can protect them in the portal. ... [Jeff] Choate was a winner in the FCS, and he'll get it figured out."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	18	**MARCUS BELLON (SR.)**	7	Marquis Ashley (Sr.)
WR	12	Nate Burleson II (So.)	3	Charles Brown (Sr.)
WR	9	Marshaun Brown (So.)	80	Daijon Calimon (Fr.)
LT	55	Snoop Leota-Amaama (Jr.)	64	Kai Arneson (Sr.)
LG	54	**JOSH GRABOWSKI (SR.)**	72	Jakobus Seth (Jr.)
C	78	**ANDREW MADRIGAL (SR.)**	57	Dylan Lopez (Jr.)
RG	57	Dylan Lopez (Jr.)	72	Jakobus Seth (Jr.)
RT	77	John Bolles (Sr.)	64	Kai Arneson (Sr.)
TE	16	Jace Henry (Sr.)	11	Andrew Savaiinaea (Jr.)
QB	13	Chubba Purdy (Sr.)	10	AJ Bianco (Jr.)
RB	20	Caleb Ramseur (Jr.)	26	Ashton Hayes (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	32	Dylan Labarbera (Jr.)	11	LeVar Talley (So.)
NT	43	Nelson Ropati (Sr.)	96	Tanner Vaughan (Sr.)
DT	66	**THOMAS WITTE (SR.)**	96	Tanner Vaughan (Sr.)
DE	95	Jonathan Maldonado (Jr.)	11	LeVar Talley (So.)
LB	44	Austin Harnetiaux (Jr.)	58	Jayden LaGrone (So.)
LB	33	Stone Combs (Jr.)	22	H. Anahu-Ambrosio (So.)
LB	45	Chris Smalley (Sr.)	11	LeVar Talley (So.)
CB	16	Kasen Kinchen (Sr.)	26	Jackson Barton (Fr.)
CB	26	Jackson Barton (Fr.)	25	Bryson Parker (Sr.)
SS	20	Denon Fagan (Sr.)	31	Donoven DeRicco (Jr.)
FS	15	Bishop Turner (So.)	20	Denon Fagan (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Kian Afrookhteh (So.)	KR	7	Marquis Ashley (Sr.)
P	37	Tyler Manship (Jr.)	PR	18	Marcus Bellon (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

NEVADA WOLF PACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 109 | MWC PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 3-10, 0-7 MWC

OFFENSE Could this be the year Chubba Purdy enjoys some success as a healthy QB1? Nevada is banking on it, as the much traveled sixth-year senior returns for his final season. Purdy spent four injury-filled years at Florida State and Nebraska before coming to Nevada last season, where he promptly got hurt in fall camp. He was healthy in the spring.

Caleb Ramseur and Ashton Hayes project as the main ball-carriers. Ramseur was in the rotation a bit a year ago, earning 32 carries, while Hayes was in the same role in 2023 after transferring in from Cal.

Wide receiver Marcus Bellon will be Purdy's main target. He had 111 receiving yards and a pair of touchdowns at Hawai'i a year ago. Nate Burleson II, son of the 11-year NFL veteran, will be promoted into a starting position along with Marshaun Brown. Tight end Jace Henry started the first four games in 2024 before suffering a season-ending injury.

Along the line, veteran starters Andrew Madrigal (center) and Josh Grabowski (left guard) will lead a group that was middle of the pack in the conference in both rushing offense and sacks allowed in 2024.

DEFENSE Only one starter returns for a unit that was 95th in the nation in scoring defense (28.8 ppg). Defensive tackle Thomas Witte is in his fifth season and will be one of the leaders. Defensive end Dylan Labarbera was starting toward the latter half of last season and projects as another staple.

At linebacker, Austin Harnetiaux was in the rotation and made 44 tackles in a reserve role in 2024, and Stone Combs was active with 58 total stops. They give the Wolf Pack a solid base.

In the secondary, Nevada was wiped out with departures, and this year's projected starters were all special teams players last season. Corner Kasen Kinchen spent two seasons at Washington State and one at Washington before playing special teams last year for the Pack.

SPECIALISTS Kian Afrookhteh split placekicking duties with the graduated Matthew Killam last season, making his only two field goals and handling some of the kickoffs. At punter, Tyler Manship redshirted last season after two years at El Camino (Calif.) College. He had the job coming out of spring, but the coaching staff may look to the portal before the fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS On the one hand, Nevada was one of only six FBS schools to go winless in league play in '24. On the other, the Wolf Pack won at Oregon State, lost at Boise State by just seven points and lost five other games by one score. Head coach Jeff Choate is again in scramble mode, but things are more organized this year. A bowl game might be out of reach, but don't expect the Pack to go winless in the Mountain West again.

2024 RESULTS (3-10, 0-7 MWC)

Aug. 24	SMU	L	24-29
Aug. 31	at Troy	W	28-26
Sept. 7	Georgia Southern	L	17-20
Sept. 14	at Minnesota	L	0-27
Sept. 21	Eastern Washington	W	49-16
Oct. 5	at San José State	L	31-35
Oct. 12	Oregon State	W	42-37
Oct. 18	Fresno State	L	21-24
Oct. 26	at Hawai'i	L	13-34
Nov. 2	Colorado State	L	21-38
Nov. 9	at Boise State	L	21-28
Nov. 23	Air Force	L	19-22
Nov. 30	at UNLV	L	14-38

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Penn State
Sept. 6	Sacramento State
Sept. 13	Middle Tennessee
Sept. 20	at WKU
Oct. 4	at Fresno State
Oct. 11	San Diego State
Oct. 18	at New Mexico
Oct. 25	Boise State
Nov. 8	at Utah State
Nov. 15	San José State
Nov. 22	at Wyoming
Nov. 29	UNLV

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Mason Johnson, WR	★★★
2.	Carter Jackson, RB	★★★
3.	DJ Asiasi, TE	★★★
4.	Kameron Brown, EDGE	★★★
5.	Dominic Kelley, RB	★★★
6.	Aiden Walker, CB	★★★
7.	Carter Jones, QB	★★★
8.	Justin Wyatt Jr., S	★★★
9.	Jackson Ramsey, IOL	★★★
10.	Joe Birnbaum, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Choate • Record at School: 3-10 (1 year) • Career Record: 31-32 (5 years) Offensive Coordinator: David Gilbertson • Defensive Coordinator: Kane Ioane • Location: Reno, Nev. • Stadium: Mackay Stadium (27,000)

NEW MEXICO LOBOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 123 | MWC PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-4 MWC

OFFENSE You can emphasize the "New" in New Mexico this year, especially on offense. Just one starter is back from last year's unit that averaged 33.5 points per game. Jack Layne is slated to take over at quarterback. The FCS Idaho transfer joined head coach Jason Eck and offensive coordinator Luke Schleusner in moving from Idaho to New Mexico. Layne's knowledge of the offense should help the transition.

At running back, Scottre Humphrey was an FCS All-American at Montana State, rushing for 1,386 yards and 16 touchdowns. Damon Bankston, another 1,000-yard rusher from the FCS Big Sky Conference (Weber State), will also figure prominently. New Mexico also brought in Conference USA's Freshman of the Year D.J. McKinney (Sam Houston).

The wide receivers room will be rebuilt from scratch. Keagan Johnson from Kansas State looks like the top option, and Isaiah Blair and Kader Diop had impressive springs. Arizona transfer Dorian Thomas and Aiden Valdez headline the tight ends. The one returning offensive line starter is left guard Richard Pearce, though Tevin Shaw was slated to start at left tackle last season before tearing his ACL in the second game.

DEFENSE The Lobos allowed 38 points per game last season, but help may be on the way. The linebacker corps is very solid, headlined by returners Randolph Kpai and Dimitri Johnson. Idaho transfer Jaxton Eck, the head coach's son, was an FCS All-American after making 111 tackles.

Safety Tavian Combs is one of the team's most talented players, but he has missed the better part of two years with injuries. He was 100% in the spring and making plays. UCLA transfer Clint Stephens also impressed. Ohio transfer Austin Brawley has also made an immediate impact in the secondary and will force his way onto the field. Athletic corner Abraham Williams is one of seven Idaho Vandals who joined their coach.

The defensive line may need post-spring reinforcements. Gabriel Lopez returns at defensive tackle after making 31 tackles in nine games. Jawaun Singletary has moved across the line from center to defensive tackle, and 331-pound Brian Booker opened some eyes at nose tackle in the spring.

SPECIALISTS Luke Drzewiecki is back after making 13-of-18 field goals in 2024. He has been consistent throughout his career. Punter Charles Steinkamp has a big leg but has been less consistent. Williams has five career 100-yard kickoff returns at the FCS level.

FINAL ANALYSIS New Mexico has a challenging road slate with conference rivals San José State, Boise State and UNLV, plus Michigan and UCLA. A bowl game is probably out of reach, but the Lobos will be competitive if the defense stays healthy and the running game can carry the offense.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-4 MWC)

Aug. 24	Montana State	L	31-35
Aug. 31	at Arizona	L	39-61
Sept. 14	at Auburn	L	19-45
Sept. 21	Fresno State	L	21-38
Sept. 28	at New Mexico State	W	50-40
Oct. 12	Air Force	W	52-37
Oct. 19	at Utah State	W	50-45
Oct. 26	at Colorado State	L	6-17
Nov. 2	Wyoming	L	45-49
Nov. 8	at San Diego State	W	21-16
Nov. 16	Washington State	W	38-35
Nov. 30	at Hawai'i	L	30-38

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Michigan
Sept. 6	Idaho State
Sept. 13	at UCLA
Sept. 27	New Mexico State
Oct. 4	at San José State
Oct. 11	at Boise State
Oct. 18	Nevada
Oct. 25	Utah State
Nov. 1	at UNLV
Nov. 15	Colorado State
Nov. 22	at Air Force
Nov. 29	San Diego State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Toa Faavae, QB	★★★
2.	Jack Burzynski, EDGE	★★★
3.	Darrion Bowers, RB	★★★
4.	Keshawn Monroe, S	★★★
5.	James Marshall V, EDGE	★★★
6.	Cody Thumlert, EDGE	★★★
7.	Carlos Barela, EDGE	★★★
8.	Thomas Pettus, LB	★★★
9.	Blake Ryan, IOL	★★★
10.	Jubilee Siitia-Tasi, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jason Eck • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 26-13 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Luke Schleusner • Defensive Coordinator: Dan Jackson • Location: Albuquerque, N.M. • Stadium: University Stadium (39,224)

RANDOLPH KPAI

SCOUTING THE LOBOS

"They're starting at rock bottom again. Bronco [Mendenhall] leaving makes sense, but it doesn't help them, and they lost most of the quality guys that staff brought in for the one season. ... Jason Eck is the best move they could make. This is a place that makes sense for an FCS head coach to come in. You aren't going to attract someone already at this level or a promising coordinator. ... The only way to create a long-term change is if they can build a recruiting culture that starts in high school and builds with word of mouth among recruits. Bronco was a great move, but he's gone. They need to find something they can own and build with in recruiting, or they're going to be stuck in the bottom of the league."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	6	Keagan Johnson (Sr.)	14	Shawn Miller (Jr.)
WR	5	Isaiah Blair (Jr.)	18	Kader Diop (Jr.)
WR	17	Michael Buckley (Jr.)	10	Evan Wysong (So.)
LT	75	Tevin Shaw (Jr.)	71	Travis Gray (Jr.)
LG	66	Israel Mukwiza (Sr.)	72	Nevell Brown (Sr.)
C	50	Isaiah Sillemon (Sr.)	51	Malik Aliane (Jr.)
RG	**78**	**RICHARD PEARCE (SR.)**	59	Kaden Robnett (Fr.)
RT	52	RJ Adams (Sr.)	68	Tyler Lawrence (So.)
TE	7	Dorian Thomas (So.)	11	Aiden Valdez (Jr.)
QB	2	Jack Layne (Jr.)	13	James Laubstein (Sr.)
RB	22	Scottre Humphrey (Jr.)	1	Damon Bankston (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	1	Keyshawn James-Newby (Sr.)	15	Xavier Slayton (Jr.)
NT	92	Brian Booker (Jr.)	69	Tavien Ford (Sr.)
DT	**9**	**GABRIEL LOPEZ (SR.)**	93	Jawaun Singletary (Sr.)
EDGE	10	Darren Agu (Jr.)	17	Okiki Olorunfunmi (Sr.)
LB	22	Dimitri Johnson (Jr.)	19	Elijah Brody (So.)
LB	**33**	**RANDOLPH KPAI (SR.)**	6	Jaxton Eck (Jr.)
CB	**12**	**JON JOHNSON (SR.)**	4	Jayden Sheridan (Sr.)
CB	2	Abraham Williams (Sr.)	24	Azariah Levells (Sr.)
NB	0	Albert Nunes (Sr.)	27	Jahvante Royal (Sr.)
SS	8	Clint Stephens (Jr.)	7	Tavian Combs (Sr.)
FS	21	Austin Brawley (Sr.)	20	Dereck Moore (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	13	Luke Drzewiecki (Sr.)	KR	2	Abraham Williams (Sr.)
P	35	Charles Steinkamp (Jr.)	PR	17	Michael Buckley (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAM WASSON/GETTY IMAGES

TREY WHITE

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE AZTECS

"Until they can find a quarterback that fits what [Sean] Lewis wants to do, they're going to struggle. The transfers are both dual-threat guys, and that was missing from the position last year. ... Recruiting is really strong there; they're taking advantage of the Pac-12 announcement, and it will work well for them recruiting locally. ... I think they're making a lot of moves right now that will show up down the road. They've hired a GM from Notre Dame [Caleb Davis], and they grabbed some local guys in the portal who are from the area. They're building with that conference move in mind and want to be the local brand in Southern California. ... They need to win more games this year, but if you look at how Lewis built it at Kent, it's about Year 2 where they click."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	Jordan Napier (So.)	84	Ben Scolari (Fr.)
WR	19	Myles Kitt-Denton (Sr.)	15	Jacob Bostick (Jr.)
WR	85	Jerry McClure (So)	81	Will Cianfrini (Fr.)
LT	78	Joseph Borjon (Sr.)	**70**	**CHRISTIAN JONES (SR.)**
LG	70	Christian Jones (Sr.)	78	Joseph Borjon (Sr.)
C	**63**	**ROSS ULUGALU-MASEULI (SR.)**	72	Dallas Fincher (Sr.)
RG	**65**	**TYLER MCMAHAN (SR.)**	57	Saipale Fuimaono (Sr.)
RT	75	Bayo Kannike (Sr.)	79	Cam May (Jr.)
TE	90	Seth Adams (Sr.)	90	Arthur Ban (Fr.)
QB	10	Jayden Denegal (Jr.)	5	Bert Emanuel Jr. (Jr.)
RB	27	Lucky Sutton (Jr.)	24	Christian Washington (Jr.)

DEFENSE (10)

DE	**33**	**BRADY NASSAR (JR.)**	32	Niles King (Sr.)
NG	90	Sam Benjamin (Sr.)	94	Teivis Tuioti (Sr.)
DT	**54**	**KRISHNA CLAY (JR.)**		Malachi Finau (Jr.)
DE	**2**	**TREY WHITE (JR.)**	96	Ryan Henderson (Jr.)
LB	**21**	**TANO LETULI (JR.)**	41	Mister Williams (Sr.)
LB	**5**	**OWEN CHAMBLISS (SO.)**	42	Brady Anderson (Sr.)
CB	**1**	**CHRIS JOHNSON (SR.)**	15	Tayvion Beasley (Jr.)
CB	**0**	**BRYCE PHILLIPS (SR.)**	16	Jelani Whitmore (Sr.)
NB	**6**	**ERIC BUTLER (SR.)**	24	Josiah Cox (Jr.)
SS	**9**	**DALESEAN STALEY (JR.)**	20	Jelani McLaughlin (So.)
FS	**17**	**DESHAWN MCCUIN (SR.)**	26	Dwayne McDougle (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	11	Gabriel Plascencia (Sr.)	KR	2 Jordan Napier (So.)
P	29	Hunter Green (Jr.)	PR	2 Jordan Napier (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 101 | MWC PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-5 MWC

OFFENSE The battle for the Aztecs' starting quarterback job will likely be settled in August. Jayden Denegal has transferred in from Michigan, where he redshirted in 2022 and saw mop-up duty in 2023 behind J.J. McCarthy, but he never saw the field in 2024. He says he is eager to compete for the QB1 spot after feeling like he was denied the opportunity at Michigan. Bert Emanuel Jr., whose father had an 11-year NFL career as a wide receiver, will be in the mix after battling injuries at Central Michigan. Emanuel would be more of a run-first option.

Elsewhere in the backfield, Lucky Sutton and Christian Washington will likely be splitting carries. Washington arrives from Coastal Carolina, where he had 537 rushing yards and five touchdowns in 2024.

Slot receiver Jordan Napier was an effective weapon last season, but the Aztecs are looking to get more big plays out of this position. Napier had 43 catches for 440 yards and should be a reliable target. The rest of the receivers are new, with Jerry McClure arriving from UCLA, Myles Kitt-Denton from FCS Northwestern State and Jacob Bostick from Texas A&M.

Three starters return on the offensive line, and a fourth, left tackle Joseph Borjon, tore his ACL in Week 1 last year after winning the job following his transfer from Arizona. This unit could be a team strength.

DEFENSE This unit has 10 returning starters, although it ranked No. 114 nationally in total defense and No. 97 in scoring defense a year ago. Defensive end Trey White was a first-team All-Mountain West selection last season after leading the league with 12.5 sacks. Two other defensive linemen also return in Brady Nassar and Krishna Clay.

At middle linebacker, Tano Letuli and Owen Chambliss are both back. Letuli earned All-MWC honorable mention honors after his 70-tackle season a year ago. Chambliss is a former Utah transfer.

In the secondary, cornerback Chris Johnson is the unquestioned leader. At the other corner, Bryce Phillips is taking advantage of the Diego Pavia rule for junior college transfers and is back for another season. Eric Butler also received All-MWC honorable mention recognition in 2024.

SPECIALISTS Gabriel Plascencia returns after hitting 13-of-14 field-goal attempts in 2024. Punter Hunter Green arrives from FCS Northern Colorado, where he averaged 46.4 yards per kick. Napier is set to handle returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS San Diego State is coming off two straight losing seasons for the first time since 2008-09. If a quarterback emerges and the defense improves, the Aztecs should be in contention for a bowl game, which would show nice progress in head coach Sean Lewis' second season.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-5 MWC)			
Aug. 31	East Texas A&M	W	45-14
Sept. 7	Oregon State	L	0-21
Sept. 14	at California	L	10-31
Sept. 28	at Central Michigan	L	21-22
Oct. 5	Hawai'i	W	27-24
Oct. 12	at Wyoming	W	27-24
Oct. 26	Washington State	L	26-29
Nov. 1	at Boise State	L	24-56
Nov. 8	New Mexico	L	16-21
Nov. 16	at UNLV	L	20-41
Nov. 23	at Utah State	L	20-41
Nov. 30	Air Force	L	20-31

2025 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 28	Stony Brook
Sept. 6	at Washington St.
Sept. 20	California
Sept. 27	at Northern Illinois
Oct. 4	Colorado State
Oct. 11	at Nevada
Oct. 25	at Fresno State
Nov. 1	Wyoming
Nov. 8	at Hawai'i
Nov. 15	Boise State
Nov. 22	San José State
Nov. 29	at New Mexico

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Jordin Thomas, RB	★★★
2. Jett Thomas, IOL	★★★
3. Marcus Mozer, WR	★★★
4. Jerry Washington, EDGE	★★★
5. Jaylon Hawkins, WR	★★★
6. Delon Craft Jr., OT	★★★
7. Brian Towsend Jr., EDGE	★★★
8. Sidney Dupuy, DL	★★★
9. JP Mialovski, QB	★★★
10. Jacob Alvarez, TE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sean Lewis • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 27-40 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Matt Johnson • Defensive Coordinator: Rob Aurich • Location: San Diego, Calif. • Stadium: Snapdragon Stadiumn (35,000)

SAN JOSÉ STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 75 | MWC PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 3-4 MWC

OFFENSE Ken Niumatalolo resumed his coaching career last season at San José State, but if you were expecting an option offense, you were sorely disappointed. Offensive coordinator Craig Stutzmann installed a "Spread-and-Shred" offense that emphasized the pass, and the Spartans finished No. 5 in the nation in passing and No. 131 in rushing.

Year 2 of the "Spread-and-Shred" will feature quarterback Walker Eget, who started the final seven games. Eget averaged 301 passing yards per start and has a solid understanding of the scheme's route option concepts.

Nick Nash has graduated after leading the nation in TD receptions (16), finishing second in yards (1,382) and tying for second in catches (104). Tight end Jackson Canaan (28-314) returns. Matthew Coleman will start in Nash's slot position like he did in the Hawaii Bowl, where he made 12 catches for 119 yards.

Jabari Bates, Floyd Chalk IV and Lamar Radcliffe will all share carries as the running game looks to improve. The trio combined for 1,190 yards from scrimmage and 13 total touchdowns in 2024.

The offensive line loses two starters but still returns plenty of starting experience. Tyler Chen and Sione Nomani will be the guards, and Joseph Harbert returns from injury to take over at center.

DEFENSE Linebacker Jordan Pollard was a first-team All-Mountain West selection last year and will have a shot at Defensive Player of the Year honors this season. Taniela Latu (70 tackles), Noah McNeal-Franklin (53 tackles) and Ethan Powell (five tackles for a loss) are also back.

Gafa Faga earned All-Mountain West honorable mention recognition last season at nose guard and will anchor the line. Quincy Likio started the first four games at end before undergoing season-ending hand surgery, and Dejon Roney was a rotational player who should see more snaps.

Safety Isiah Revis, the team's second-leading returning tackler who is an all-league candidate, leads the secondary. Jalen Bainer and Runye Norton will be the new cornerbacks, but the group as a whole has questions.

SPECIALISTS Punter Trent Carrizosa averaged a solid 43.2 yards per boot last season and will resume his duties. Mathias Brown was the Spartans' kickoff specialist last season, and he handled field goals in the spring. San José State may look for another kicker to add for August.

FINAL ANALYSIS San José State made another bowl game in 2024 despite a chaotic offseason that saw head coach Brent Brennan depart for Arizona amid massive roster turnover. In 2025, the foundation is in place, and the two teams from last season's MWC title game — UNLV and Boise State — are not on the schedule. Another bowl game is within reach.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 3-4 MW)

Aug. 29	Sacramento State	W	42-24
Sept. 7	at Air Force	W	17-7
Sept. 14	Kennesaw State	W	31-10
Sept. 20	at Washington St. (ot)	L	52-54
Oct. 5	Nevada	W	35-31
Oct. 12	at Colorado State	L	24-31
Oct. 19	Wyoming	W	24-14
Oct. 26	at Fresno State	L	10-33
Nov. 9	at Oregon State	W	24-13
Nov. 16	Boise State	L	21-42
Nov. 22	UNLV	L	16-27
Nov. 29	Stanford	W	34-31
Dec. 24	vs. South Florida # (ot)	L	39-41

#Hawaii Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Central Michigan
Sept. 6	at Texas
Sept. 20	Idaho
Sept. 27	at Stanford
Oct. 4	New Mexico
Oct. 11	at Wyoming
Oct. 18	at Utah State
Nov. 1	Hawai'i
Nov. 8	Air Force
Nov. 15	at Nevada
Nov. 22	at San Diego State
Nov. 29	Fresno State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jase Nix, WR	★★★
2.	Braiden Bachich-Dixon, TE	★★★
3.	Tama Amisone, QB	★★★
4.	Sir Autry, RB	★★★
5.	Jordan Tonga, IOL	★★★
6.	Jireh Moe, DL	★★★
7.	Steve Chavez, RB	★★★
8.	JT Taylor, CB	★★★
9.	Sirr Bible, LB	★★★
10.	Daniel Tuliau, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ken Niumatalolo • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year) • Career Record: 116-89 (16+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Craig Stutzmann Defensive Coordinator: Derrick Odum • Location: San Jose, Calif. Stadium: CEFCU Stadium (18,203)

WALKER EGET

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

"Ken [Niumatalolo] did a remarkable job with this program in his first year. Because they're not a bigger-profile program like Boise, I don't think this staff got the recognition they deserved for the turnaround. I think they also did good by the service academy coaches, proving those guys can adapt and be successful at civilian gigs. It's definitely important that a guy like [wide receiver] Nick Nash stood out in their system; that's a sign to other skill position players on offense. ... They've grabbed West Coast guys from bigger schools in the portal so far, and they're really taking advantage of their recruiting connections. ... You have to wonder if this staff doesn't get scooped up by a bigger school if they can go to another bowl this season."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	13	Cooper Hoch (So.)	1	Jahari Johnson (Jr.)
WR	14	Matthew Coleman (Jr.)	10	Danny Scudero (So.)
WR	4	Kyri Shoels (Jr.)	3	Leland Smith (Jr.)
LT	72	Nate Hale (So.)	63	Mohammad Othman (Fr.)
LG	62	Tyler Chen (So.)	73	Laakea Kapoi (Jr.)
C	75	Joseph Harbert (Jr.)	**60**	**HUDSON MESA (SR.)**
RG	**74**	**SIONE NOMANI (SR.)**	65	Denaris DeRosa Jr. (Jr.)
RT	**79**	**PESETI LAPUAHO (SR.)**	71	Makoni Manukainiu (So.)
TE	85	Jackson Canaan (Sr.)	83	Kamaehu Kopa-Kaawlauole (So.)
QB	**5**	**WALKER EGET (SR.)**	7	Xavier Ward (Sr.)
RB	6	Jabari Bates (Jr.)	**0**	**FLOYD CHALK IV (SR.)**

DEFENSE (4)

DE	91	Quincy Likio (Sr.)	57	Justin Stearns (Jr.)
NG	**50**	**GAFA FAGA (SR.)**	94	Mata Hola (Sr.)
DT	48	Dejon Roney (Sr.)	92	Noa Siaosi (So.)
DE	51	Etu Finau (Jr.)	97	John Norwood (Jr.)
LB	**10**	**JORDAN POLLARD (SR.)**	18	Dylan Lee (So.)
LB	**4**	**TANIELA LATU (SR.)**	26	Ethan Powell (Sr.)
LB	9	Noah McNeal-Franklin (Sr.)	24	Malakai Hoeft (Sr.)
CB	15	Jalen Bainer (Sr.)	22	Marzeal Smith (Jr.)
CB	8	Runye Norton (Jr.)	21	Charles Cox III (Jr.)
SS	7	Jalen Apalit-Williams (Sr.)	29	Jaylen Thomas (Fr.)
FS	**20**	**ISIAH REVIS (SR.)**	5	Larry Turner-Gooden (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Mathias Brown (So.)	KR	6	Jabari Bates (Jr.)
P	49	Trent Carrizosa (Jr.)	PR	14	Matthew Coleman (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

AKIN HOWARD-IMAGN IMAGES

JAI'DEN THOMAS

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"On one hand, you could say that hiring Dan Mullen shows how seriously they're taking the program and how much things have changed at that school. But as of now, they're staying in the league, and there's been talk about not being able to meet their investments financially. I think Mullen is a short-term situation similar to [Barry] Odom. If they can get the same results, it will be a huge success for them. ... The quarterback competition will determine their season; I think both guys could fit what Mullen's known for, but I'd give the edge to [Alex] Orji just based on his experience and his makeup. ... Mullen is probably the best coach in this league immediately, but they have a lot of work to do to maintain what the program did last year."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	23	Jaden Bradley (Sr.)	88	Koy Moore (Sr.)
WR	17	Troy Omeire (Sr.)	16	Daejon Reynolds (Jr.)
WR	84	JoJo Earle (Sr.)	18	DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Jr.)
LT	55	James Faminu (Sr.)	71	Ed Haynes (So.)
LG	60	Malik McGowan (Sr.)	67	Toby Moore (Fr.)
C	64	Reid Williams (Sr.)	61	Graham Keating III (Sr.)
RG	59	Donavan Manson (Sr.)	79	Austin Boyd (Jr.)
RT	62	Nick Scalise (Sr.)	72	Will Thomas (Jr.)
TE	33	Var'keyes Gumms (Jr.)	32	Nick Elksnis (Sr.)
QB	10	Anthony Colandrea (Jr.)	11	Alex Orji (Sr.)
RB	**9**	**JAI'DEN THOMAS (JR.)**	20	Jaylon Glover (So.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	86	Ose Egbase (Sr.)	84	Cory Hall (Jr.)
NT	99	Jalen Lee (Sr.)	91	Waisale Muavesi (Sr.)
DT	93	Lucas Conti (So.)	98	Cohen Fuller (Sr.)
EDGE	89	Chief Borders (Sr.)	88	John Lewis (Sr.)
MLB	**55**	**MARSEL MCDUFFIE (SR.)**	53	Blesyng Alualu-Tuiolemotu (So.)
WLB	43	Bryce Edmondson (Sr.)	58	Jordan Eubanks (Jr.)
CB	26	Denver Harris (Sr.)	20	Mumu Bin-Wahad (So.)
CB	38	Laterrance Welch (Jr.)	33	Andrew Powdrell (Jr.)
NB	21	Aamaris Brown (Sr.)	39	Jeremiah Vessel (So.)
SS	32	Jake Pope (So.)	24	Kodi DeCambra (So.)
FS	28	Jaheem Joseph (Jr.)	14	Jah'Von Grigsby (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	1	Caden Costa (Sr.)	KR 18	DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Jr.)
P	0	Cameron Brown (Fr.)	PR 18	DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

AMIE SABAU-IMAGN IMAGES

UNLV REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 60 | MWC PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 6-1 MWC

OFFENSE The quarterback battle will likely carry into August between Virginia transfer Anthony Colandrea and Michigan transfer Alex Orji. Orji could never win the job at Michigan, while Colandrea saw extensive playing time in his two years at Virginia. Colandrea clearly is the better passer, while Orji is more imposing. Will new head coach Dan Mullen use both, with Orji playing the same role he had at Michigan?

Running back Jai'Den Thomas was a second-team All-Mountain West performer last season and is the most prominent returner from last year's MWC runners-up. Thomas had 999 yards from scrimmage (918 rushing).

Wide receiver Troy Omeire had a big Peach Bowl for Arizona State and turned in an excellent spring. Power 4 transfers JoJo Earle from TCU and Daejon Reynolds from Pitt also bring talent to the receivers room. DeAngelo Irvin Jr. will man the slot. The tight ends will be Var'keyes Gumms (more of a receiver) and Nick Elksnis (more of a blocker).

The O-line will need to be rebuilt, but Malik McGowan comes in from North Carolina, and center Reid Williams won the FCS Rimington Award last year at Chattanooga.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Zach Arnett left the program unexpectedly in April for personal reasons. Paul Guenther, whose background is mostly in the NFL, will now be in charge of rebuilding a unit that lost almost all of its key players.

Marsel McDuffie started at linebacker and made 46 tackles. The line has two former reserves who project to start in Ose Egbase and Lucas Conti. Edge Chief Borders will conclude his college journey by reuniting with Mullen after going from Florida to Nebraska to Pitt.

In the secondary, safety Jake Pope has emerged as a leader. He spent two years at Alabama and one at Georgia buried on the depth chart. Jaheem Joseph comes in from West Virginia to man the other safety spot.

SPECIALISTS Australian Cameron Brown will take over at punter as a true freshman. At kicker, Caden Kosta comes in from Memphis after making 8-of-13 attempts last season. He was just 4-of-9 from beyond 30 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Like many teams, UNLV is bringing in a lot of transfers. The difference is that the Rebels have mostly Power 4 players on the way to restock a team that suddenly faces expectations.

Mullen — one of the splashier head-coaching hires of the offseason — will need to figure out how to maximize his quarterbacks and mesh all the arriving talent into a cohesive unit. The potential for a third straight trip to the MWC title game is there.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 6-1 MWC)

Aug. 31	at Houston	W	27-7
Sept. 7	Utah Tech	W	72-14
Sept. 13	vs. Kansas #	W	23-20
Sept. 28	Fresno State	W	59-14
Oct. 4	Syracuse (ot)	L	41-44
Oct. 11	at Utah State	W	50-34
Oct. 19	at Oregon State	W	33-25
Oct. 25	Boise State	L	24-29
Nov. 9	at Hawai'i	W	29-27
Nov. 16	San Diego State	W	41-20
Nov. 22	at San José State	W	27-16
Nov. 30	Nevada	W	38-14
Dec. 6	at Boise State %	L	7-21
Dec. 18	vs. Cal &	W	24-13

#Kansas City %MW Championship &LA Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Sam Houston
Sept. 6	UCLA
Sept. 13	Idaho State
Sept. 20	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 4	at Wyoming
Oct. 11	Air Force
Oct. 18	at Boise State
Nov. 1	New Mexico
Nov. 8	at Colorado State
Nov. 15	Utah State
Nov. 22	Hawai'i
Nov. 29	at Nevada

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kamran Williams, RB	★★★★
2.	Mumu Bin-Wahad, CB	★★★
3.	Ace Robinson, OT	★★★
4.	Quandarius Keyes, CB	★★★
5.	Logan Christensen, ATH	★★★
6.	Cassidee Miles, WR	★★★
7.	Tavian McNair, WR	★★★
8.	Jordan Covington, EDGE	★★★
9.	Joshua Tuchek, CB	★★★
10.	Alexander Green, LB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dan Mullen • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 103-61 (13 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Corey Dennis • Defensive Coordinator: Paul Guenther • Location: Las Vegas, Nev.
Stadium: Sam Boyd Stadium (36,800)

UTAH STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 106 | MWC PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 3-4 MWC

OFFENSE Bryson Barnes will be Bronco Mendenhall's QB1 as the veteran coach tries to get the Aggies back on track after coming in from New Mexico. Barnes began last season as the starter for Utah State, lost his job, then won it back and closed with a flourish, setting a school record for most rushing yards by a QB with 193 vs. San Diego State.

Two transfers will be depended on to carry the running game. Miles Davis arrives from BYU after five years of backup work. Mendenhall brought Javen Jacobs with him from New Mexico, where he had 407 all-purpose yards, including 130 receiving yards.

The receiving corps will feature several of the 41 new players on the roster. Corey Thompson Jr. transferred from UNLV, where he had a limited role. Demick Starling has top-end speed and arrives from WKU by way of Virginia. Brady Boyd (Texas Tech) and Braden Pegan (UCLA) are two more little-used receivers hoping to revitalize their careers.

The line will be almost starting from scratch. Jake Eichorn comes in at center from BYU, where he saw action in nine games last year. Tavo Motu'apuaka started in 2023 but missed 2024 due to injury. Jr Sia was in line to start last season at right tackle but was injured and did not play.

DEFENSE Nose tackle Gabriel Iniguez Jr. was an honorable mention All-Mountain West selection and a team captain last year, and he will return to lead the group up front. Tyree Morris opened some eyes during the spring after transferring in from Louisiana. Kone Aumua-Uiagalelei is the cousin of DJ and Mateo Uiagalelei and is an extremely physical presence.

At linebacker, John Miller was a spring standout. He made 52 tackles last season, good for fourth on the team. Bronson Oleavo Jr. is a reserve who has shown he is ready to move into a starting role.

Free safety Ike Larsen had 80 tackles, nine pass breakups and an interception in '24. The rest of the secondary will have a heavy New Mexico flavor, with transfers Bryson Taylor (corner) and Bobby Arnold (nickel).

SPECIALISTS Two more transfers will take over at kicker and punter. Carter Brown started at Arizona State for one season and Cincinnati for one season before losing his job early last season with the Bearcats. For his career, he is 29-for-38 on field-goal attempts. Junior-college transfer Dylan Sprague is in line to punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS Utah State reached a bowl game in 11 of the previous 12 full seasons prior to 2024's 4-8 stumble. This season is full of unknowns, but it shouldn't take Mendenhall long to right the ship. He had New Mexico competitive last season, and you can expect the same at Utah State.

GABRIEL INIGUEZ JR.

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"Bronco [Mendenhall] to Logan makes more sense than just about any coaching hire I've seen in this league in a long time. State offers a much, much better chance to succeed and more resources than a place like New Mexico. With the league transition coming up, I think they're in an excellent place long-term with Bronco. ... They need a lot of work on defense. That's been the biggest problem during these last few seasons. They're not talented, and they were poorly coached. With Bronco and his guys coming in on that side, they could see a pretty significant jump in the first season if they can manage the portal. The BYU running back [Miles Davis] coming over is a great example why this was a really good hire."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)				
WR	13	Corey Thompson Jr. (Jr.)		Brady Boyd (Sr.)
WR		Demick Starling (Sr.)	3	Braden Pegan (Jr.)
WR	11	Kahanu Davis (Sr.)	0	Robert Freeman IV (Jr.)
LT	57	Trey Andersen (Sr.)	76	Camden Jury (Fr.)
LG	72	George Maile (Jr.)	64	Caysen Whittaker (Fr.)
C		Jake Eichorn (Sr.)		Kamuta Levasa (Jr.)
RG	**65**	**TAVO MOTU'APUAKA (JR.)**	73	Elia Migao (Sr.)
RT	51	Jared Pele (Sr.)	70	Jr Sia (So.)
TE	87	Broc Lane (Sr.)	83	Josh Sterzer (Sr.)
QB	16	Bryson Barnes (Sr.)	15	Jacob Conover (Sr.)
RB	2	Miles Davis (Sr.)	8	Javen Jacobs (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	45	Enoka Miago (Sr.)	44	Bo Maile (Sr.)
NT	**10**	**GABRIEL INIGUEZ JR. (SR.)**	54	Kone Aumua-Uiagalelei (Jr.)
DT	9	Tyree Morris (Jr.)	43	Tanner Jolley (So.)
EDGE	41	Carl Nesmith (Jr.)	59	William Holmes (So.)
MLB	**26**	**JOHN MILLER (SR.)**		Tymere Burton (So.)
BUCK	14	Bronson Olevao Jr. (Jr.)		Craig McDonald (Sr.)
CB		Noah Avinger (Sr.)	25	Noah Flores (So.)
CB		Bryson Taylor (Sr.)	23	Courage Ugo (Jr.)
NB		Bobby Arnold (Jr.)	13	EJ Fisk (Jr.)
SS	7	Omari Okeke (Sr.)	1	Titan Saxton (So.)
FS	**6**	**IKE LARSEN (SR.)**	28	Gio Kafentzis (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	33	Carter Brown (Jr.)	KR	0 Robert Freeman IV (Jr.)
P		Dylan Sprague (So.)	PR	11 Kahanu Davis (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-4 MWC)

Aug. 31	Robert Morris	W	36-14
Sept. 7	at USC	L	0-48
Sept. 14	Utah	L	21-38
Sept. 21	at Temple	L	29-45
Oct. 5	at Boise State	L	30-62
Oct. 11	UNLV	L	34-50
Oct. 19	New Mexico	L	45-50
Oct. 26	at Wyoming	W	27-25
Nov. 9	at Washington State	L	28-49
Nov. 16	Hawa'i	W	55-10
Nov. 23	San Diego State	W	41-20
Nov. 29	at Colorado State	L	37-42

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	UTEP
Sept. 6	at Texas A&M
Sept. 13	Air Force
Sept. 20	McNeese
Sept. 27	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 11	at Hawai'i
Oct. 18	San José State
Oct. 25	at New Mexico
Nov. 8	Nevada
Nov. 15	at UNLV
Nov. 22	at Fresno State
Nov. 29	Boise State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

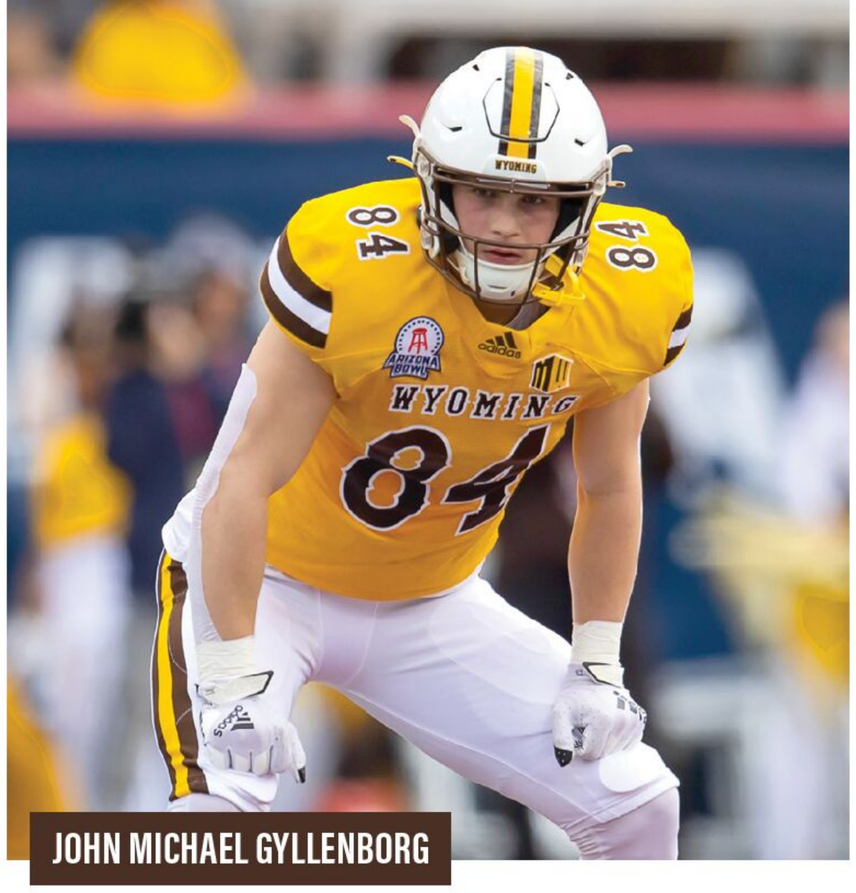
1.	Charger Doty, S	★★★
2.	Malakai Alofipo, WR	★★★
3.	Chris Joe, LB	★★★
4.	Lava Vailahi, CB	★★★
5.	Ryan-Jalen Tillman, S	★★★
6.	Ty Olsen, WR	★★★
7.	Sam Brousseau, OT	★★★
8.	Ravian Larry, RB	★★★
9.	Jared Smith, OT	★★★
10.	Paxton Naegle, EDGE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bronco Mendenhall • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 140-88 (18 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kevin McGiven • Defensive Coordinator: Nick Howell • Location: Logan, Utah • Stadium: Maverik Stadium (25,513)

JAMIE SABAU-IMAGN IMAGES



JOHN MICHAEL GYLLENBORG

MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"The offense disappeared last year. This staff is more or less a continuation of the Craig Bohl philosophy that brought more consistency to the program. They want to play really hard, really tough, win with defense and run on you. The QB run game didn't work for them at all, and it's why they switched quarterbacks last season. I wouldn't be surprised if the in-state freshman [Mason Drube] gets a decent look. They're pretty thin at receiver — maybe they can grab someone in the portal. ... The good news is that the defense carried over with [Jay] Sawvel. That's the identity of the team. They're still going to play you harder than almost anyone else in the league. If they can figure out the problems on offense, they have have a chance to bounce back this season."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	13	Chris Durr Jr. (So.)	3	Deion DeBlanc (Fr.)
WR	8	Jaylen Sargent (Sr.)	9	Jackson Holman (So.)
WR	88	Jaylan Bean (Jr.)	85	Clay Nanke (Sr.)
LT	**71**	**JAKE DAVIES (SO.)**	65	Nathan Geiger (So.)
LG	**78**	**WES KING (JR.)**	75	Alex Conn (Sr.)
C	**79**	**JACK WALSH (SR.)**	57	Luke Sandy (Jr.)
RG	**72**	**CADEN BARNETT (SR.)**	76	Q. Grovesteen-Matchey (So.)
RT	70	Rex Johnsen (Jr.)	50	Giovanni Panozzo (Fr.)
TE	84	John Michael Gyllenborg (Sr.)	86	Evan Svoboda (Sr.)
QB	12	Kaden Anderson (So.)	14	Landon Sims (So.)
RB	22	Sam Scott (Sr.)	5	Terron Kellman (Jr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	5	Brayden Wilson (Sr.)	34	Esaia Bogar (Jr.)
NT	**94**	**BEN FLORENTINE (SR.)**	90	Aneesh Vyas (Sr.)
DT	98	Jayden Williams (So.)	95	Caleb Robinson (Sr.)
DE	40	Tyce Westland (Sr.)	55	Kevin Sjogren (So)
LB	6	Evan Eller (Sr.)	9	Brayden Johnson (Sr.)
LB	42	Ethan Stuhlsatz (Sr.)	26	Gary Rutherford (Fr.)
CB	14	BJ Inmon (So.)	18	Caleb Merritt (Jr.)
CB	13	Ian Bell (Jr.)	8	Tyrese Boss (Fr.)
NB	12	Desman Hearns (Jr.)	19	Malique Singleton (Jr.)
SS	3	Andrew Johnson (Sr.)	23	Jones Thomas (So.)
FS	21	Justin Taylor (So.)	22	Jaden DaCosta (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Erik Sandvik (So.)	KR	85 Clay Nanke (Sr.)
P	43	Gavyn Helm (Fr.)	PR	4 Keany Parks (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WYOMING COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 105 | MWC PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 2-5 MWC

OFFENSE Quarterback Kaden Anderson won the job late last season and started three of the final four games, throwing for 342 yards and three TDs in a 49-45 win over New Mexico. Anderson is an accurate passer who commands the offense and is not going to have many designed runs for him. He beat out Evan Svoboda, who moved to tight end.

Tight end John Michael Gyllenborg will be a Mackey Award candidate. In nine games last season, the second-team All-Mountain West performer had 30 catches for 425 yards and three touchdowns. Wide receiver Jaylen Sargent led the team with 480 yards last season, 317 of which came in Anderson's three starts. Slot man Chris Durr Jr. is also back. His 31 catches were tops on the team. Look for Arizona transfer Jackson Holman to make an impact as well.

Running back Sam Scott is back after leading the team with a modest 435 rushing yards. He will likely be part of a three-man rotation with Charlotte transfer Terron Kellman and Nico Hamilton.

Wyoming's offensive line welcomes back four starters. Second-team All-MWC Jack Walsh is moving from guard to center. Both guards for this year were starters in 2024, with Caden Barnett moving inside from tackle.

DEFENSE The Cowboys' defensive line is deep, with two stalwarts leading the way. Tyce Westland is a potential all-league candidate at defensive end, and Ben Florentine is back at nose tackle. The coaches are high on Jayden Williams at the other tackle spot. Caleb Robinson is a veteran defensive tackle who missed 2024 due to a right knee injury.

In Wyoming's 4-2-5 alignment, both starting linebackers will be new. Two redshirts from last season — Evan Eller and Gary Rutherford — both played in four games before the staff wanted to preserve the year. They are competing with transfers Brayden Johnson and Ethan Stuhlsatz, who was an All-OVC honoree at FCS Lindenwood.

Corner Ian Bell provides experience. The nickel will be manned by a combination of Desman Hearns and Malique Singleton. Wisconsin transfer Justin Taylor impressed at safety in the spring.

SPECIALISTS Wyoming bid farewell to placekicker John Hoyland after five strong seasons. Erik Sandvik is in line to take over after backing up Hoyland last season. Gavyn Helm was the punter during spring practice, but the staff may search the transfer portal before August.

FINAL ANALYSIS Wyoming went from 9-4 to 3-9 last year, but Anderson provides some optimism for the offense in front of a veteran line. The defense has some moving pieces in the back seven. A return to a bowl game is a reasonable goal for the Cowboys this season.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 2-5 MWC)

Aug. 31	at Arizona State	L	7-48
Sept. 7	Idaho	L	13-17
Sept. 14	BYU	L	14-34
Sept. 21	at North Texas	L	17-44
Sept. 28	Air Force	W	31-19
Oct. 12	San Diego State	L	24-27
Oct. 19	at San José State	L	14-24
Oct. 26	Utah State	L	25-27
Nov. 2	at New Mexico	W	49-45
Nov. 15	at Colorado State	L	10-24
Nov. 23	Boise State	L	13-17
Nov. 30	at Washington State	W	15-14

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	at Akron
Sept. 6	Northern Iowa
Sept. 13	Utah
Sept. 20	at Colorado
Oct. 4	UNLV
Oct. 11	San José State
Oct. 18	at Air Force
Oct. 25	Colorado State
Nov. 1	at San Diego State
Nov. 15	at Fresno State
Nov. 22	Nevada
Nov. 29	at Hawai'i

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Esaia Bogar, EDGE	★★★
2.	Cooper Lawson, OT	★★★
3.	Samuel Harris, RB	★★★
4.	Jason Handy, EDGE	★★★
5.	Tyson Deen, CB	★★★
6.	Patrick Broadway II, RB	★★★
7.	Jaden Lawrence, RB	★★★
8.	Steven Perez, LB	★★★
9.	Deion DeBlanc, WR	★★★
10.	Mason Drube, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Sawvel • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 3-9 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Jay Johnson
Defensive Coordinator: Aaron Bohl • Location: Laramie, Wyo. • Stadium: War Memorial Stadium (29,811)

OREGON STATE BEAVERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 86 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7

OFFENSE Oregon State head coach Trent Bray has spent his entire career on defense, but his offseason focus started with offense. One of the team's first transfer acquisitions was quarterback Maalik Murphy. At an NIL cost of $1.5 million, the Beavers look to the 6-foot-5 Murphy to bring explosiveness to the offense. If the Duke transfer repeats his 2024 numbers — 2,933 passing yards, 26 touchdowns — while cutting down on his 12 interceptions, the Beavers' offense should wake up this fall.

At a minimum, Murphy is throwing to an improved receiving corps, led by Trent Walker and Darrius Clemons. Walker is coming off the most productive season by an OSU receiver in six years, with 81 receptions for 901 yards last season. Clemons broke out late in the year and looked the part of a No. 1 receiver this spring. The Beavers' offense heavily involves the tight end, and that position was upgraded with the addition of Miami (Fla.) transfer Riley Williams and BYU transfer Jackson Bowers.

The offense's biggest question is the line, where Oregon State is attempting to replace four starters and emerged from the spring with many unknowns due to injuries.

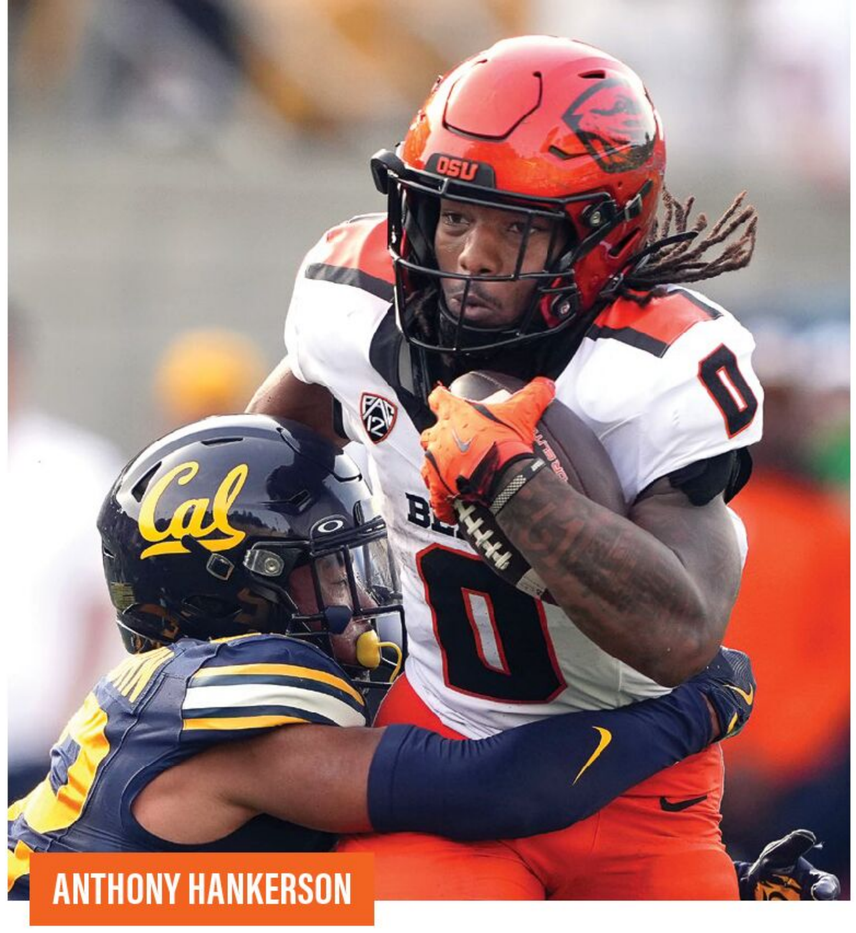
DEFENSE It didn't take long for Bray to make changes following a 2024 season in which the Beavers ranked 98th nationally in total defense. The head coach added defensive coordinator to his duties during the offseason, a role Bray filled at OSU from 2021-23. Back is an attacking defensive style that was a staple for one of the Pac-12's top units in 2022 and '23.

The Beavers appear formidable in the secondary, led by safeties Skyler Thomas and Jaheim Patterson. Thomas led OSU a year ago with 81 tackles. Also back is a rising star in sophomore corner Exodus Ayers.

If Oregon State is to experience a defensive rebound in 2025, it must start up front, where the Beavers were ineffective in pressuring the quarterback. OSU is far more experienced and potentially dangerous on the edges, with seniors Nikko Taylor and Oluwaseyi Omotosho returning, promising junior Takari Hickle recovered from knee surgery and newcomers Bleu Dantzler and Kai Wallin making an impact during the spring.

SPECIALISTS This is an area of great angst after the graduation losses of Everett Hayes (placekicker) and Josh Green (punter). Placekicker Caleb Ojeda and punters AJ Winsor and Max Walker have shown promise, but they have only a combined six kicks against FBS competition.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's potentially a nine- or 10-win season if Oregon State successfully navigates a difficult September schedule and the offensive line comes together. Anything less than a bowl appearance will raise questions about Bray's ability as a head coach.



ANTHONY HANKERSON

SCOUTING THE BEAVERS

"Coach [Trent] Bray and his staff did a really good job last season. They're definitely under-recognized, keeping program identity intact, and were one win from a bowl. ... The defensive line was really young, so if they can keep everyone out of the portal, they'll be better on that side. Now they're replacing a lot on the offensive line, so that's a big concern. ... I think the [Maalik] Murphy kid might be misunderstood a little. He left Texas early to find the best place possible, then Duke goes out and grabs another guy they have to start because of the NIL payment. Murphy is a solid QB with a really strong arm. If they can protect him and build up some talent at the skill positions, OSU should go bowling."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (4)		
WR	7	**TRENT WALKER (SR.)**	12	Zachary Card (So.)
WR	4	**DARRIUS CLEMONS (SR.)**	2	Jimmy Valsin III (Sr.)
WR	10	Taz Reddicks (So.)	17	Malachi Durant (Fr.)
LT	71	Josiah Timoteo (So.)	77	Keyon Cox (So.)
LG	66	JT Hand (Sr.)	73	Tyler Morano (Sr.)
C	55	**VAN WELLS (SR.)**	70	Zander Esty (So.)
RG	78	Nathan Elu (Jr.)	79	Tyler Voltin (Sr.)
RT	69	Jacob Strand (Jr.)	74	Jacob Anderson (So.)
TE	88	Riley Williams (Jr.)	87	Jackson Bowers (So.)
QB	6	Maalik Murphy (Jr.)	5	Gabarri Johnson (So.)
RB	0	**ANTHONY HANKERSON (SR.)**	26	Salahadin Allah (So.)
		DEFENSE (4)		
DL	98	Thomas Collins (So.)	62	**JACOB SCHUSTER (SR.)**
DL	92	Nick Norris (Sr.)	59	Tevita Pome'e (So.)
OLB	25	**NIKKO TAYLOR (SR.)**	33	Oluwaseyi Omotosho (Sr.)
ILB	7	Dexter Foster (So.)	14	Kord Shaw (Jr.)
ILB	9	Raesjon Davis (Sr.)	2	Aiden Sullivan (Jr.)
OLB	10	Zakiah Saez (So.)	43	Takari Hickle (Jr.)
CB	23	Exodus Ayers (So.)	19	Trey Glasper (Fr.)
CB	22	Jalil Tucker (Jr.)	0	Kobe Singleton (Sr.)
NB	8	**SAILASA VADRAWALE III (SO.)**	21	Noble Thomas Jr. (Jr.)
SS	6	Jaheim Patterson (Jr.)	12	Tyrice Ivy Jr. (Sr.)
FS	17	**SKYLER THOMAS (SR.)**	5	Amarion York (Jr.)
		SPECIALISTS		
K	28	Caleb Ojeda (Jr.)	KR	12 Zachary Card (So.)
P	31	Max Walker (Jr.)	PR	7 Trent Walker (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (5-7)

Aug. 31	Idaho State	W	38-15
Sept. 7	at San Diego State	W	21-0
Sept. 14	Oregon	L	14-49
Sept. 21	Purdue	W	38-21
Oct. 5	Colorado State (ot)	W	39-31
Oct. 12	at Nevada	L	37-42
Oct. 19	UNLV	L	25-33
Oct. 26	at Cal	L	9-44
Nov. 9	San José State	L	13-24
Nov. 16	at Air Force	L	0-28
Nov. 23	Washington State	W	41-38
Nov. 29	at Boise State	L	18-34

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Cal
Sept. 6	Fresno State
Sept. 13	at Texas Tech
Sept. 20	at Oregon
Sept. 27	Houston
Oct. 4	at Appalachian State
Oct. 18	Lafayette
Oct. 25	Wake Forest
Nov. 1	Washington State
Nov. 8	Sam Houston
Nov. 15	at Tulsa
Nov. 29	at Washington State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

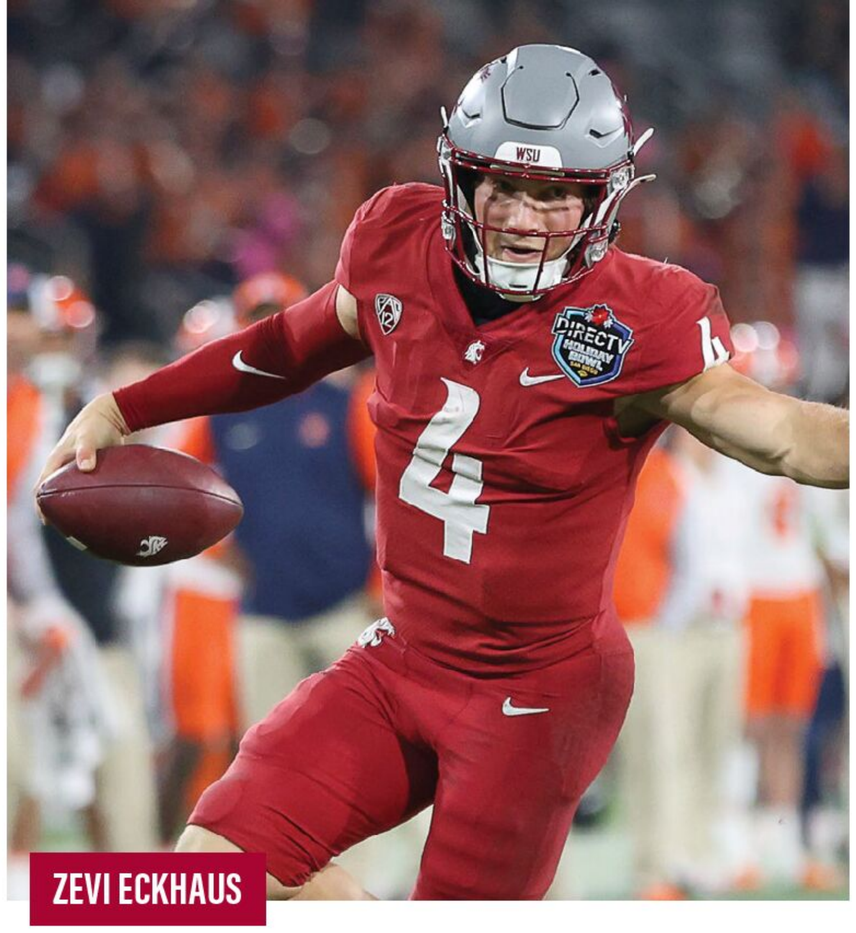
1. Tristan Ti'a, QB	★★★★
2. Trey Glasper, CB	★★★
3. Jalil Tucker, CB	★★★
4. T'Andre Waverly, ATH	★★★
5. Kourdey Glass, RB	★★★
6. Cody Siegner, TE	★★★
7. David Madison, CB	★★★
8. Blake Thompson, CB	★★★
9. Bleu Dantzler, EDGE	★★★
10. Maddox Conway, OT	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Trent Bray • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 5-7 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Gunderson
Defensive Coordinator: Keith Heyward • Location: Corvallis, Ore. • Stadium: Reser Stadium (35,548)

DARREN YAMASHITA-IMAGN IMAGES



ZEVI ECKHAUS

ABE ARREDONDO-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"A lot of people thought this was a smart hire. Yes, [QB John] Mateer and [head coach Jake] Dickert are gone, and it's going to be a very different-looking roster, and they're going to struggle during the transition because they don't have depth, but long term, this is the best plan possible for Wazzu. [Jimmy] Rogers ran a powerhouse FCS program, and they can translate a lot of what they did at that level to a place like Pullman. ... I think they will stick with [Zevi] Eckhaus at quarterback. ... They're losing a lot of the roster in the portal right now, and I think you're going to see a lot of SDSU players starting on Day 1. It's a weird situation I've never seen — you're going to see a group of FCS starters move up and play a FBS schedule."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	6	Devin Ellison (Jr.)	80	Branden Ganashamoorthy (So.)
WR	12	Leon Neal Jr. (Sr.)	10	Leyton Smithson (Sr.)
WR	**18**	**JOSH MEREDITH (SR.)**	0	Tony Freeman (Jr.)
LT	71	Ashton Tripp (So.)	77	Nick Bakken (Fr.)
LG	67	Jonny Lester (Jr.)	54	Xavier Thorpe (Fr.)
C	**65**	**BROCK DIEU (SR.)**	69	Kyle Martin (So.)
RG	75	Noah Dunham (Fr.)	68	Chris Lino (Fr.)
RT	**61**	**CHRISTIAN HILBORN (SR.)**		AJ Vaipulu (Sr.)
TE	83	Ademola Faleye (Sr.)	23	Trey Leckner (So.)
QB	4	Zevi Eckhaus (Sr.)	5	Jaxon Potter (So.)
RB	21	Angel Johnson (Sr.)	20	Kirby Vorhees (So.)
DEFENSE (0)				
DE	45	Raam Stevenson (Sr.)	90	Michael Hughes (So.)
DT	97	Max Baloun (Sr.)	53	Soni Finau (Sr.)
DT	99	Bryson Lamb (Sr.)		Buddha Peleti (Jr.)
DE	88	Isaac Terrell (Jr.)	93	Jack Janikowski (So.)
LB	9	Caleb Francl (Sr.)	0	Anthony Palano (Fr.)
LB	21	Keith Brown (Sr.)	40	Gavin Barthiel (Sr.)
LB	46	Parker McKenna (Sr.)	33	Gage Jones (Fr.)
CB	22	Colby Humphrey (Sr.)	4	Kai Rapolla (Jr.)
CB	29	Jamorri Colson (Sr.)	18	Kamani Jackson (Fr.)
SS	1	Tucker Large (Sr.)	25	Cale Reeder (Sr.)
FS	23	Matt Durrance (Sr.)	9	Kayo Patu (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Jack Stevens (Fr.)	KR 10	Leyton Smithson (Sr.)
P	98	Ryan Harris (So.)	PR 0	Tony Freeman (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 97 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5

OFFENSE Gone are the days of the Air Raid, and in its place is a run-centric approach, thanks in large part to new head coach Jimmy Rogers, whose 2023 and '24 FCS South Dakota State teams wore down opponents with a ruthless ground attack.

Returning quarterback Zevi Eckhaus, who served as the Cougars' backup last season, will still have plenty of opportunities to air it out to playmakers like Devin Ellison. But Rogers and offensive coordinator Danny Freund, whose 2024 SDSU team finished third in the FCS with 236 rushing yards per game, will likely rely mostly on the ground game, spearheaded by running backs Angel Johnson, Kirby Vorhees and Leo Pulalasi. Johnson and Voorhees combined for more than 1,100 rushing yards and 11 touchdowns last season as Jackrabbits.

WSU has some questions to answer up front. Returning offensive linemen Christian Hilborn and Brock Dieu will man the right tackle and center spots, respectively, but they'll be surrounded by newcomers. A season ago, WSU's offensive line finished first in the country in Pro Football Focus' pass-blocking grades.

DEFENSE The Washington State secondary figures to transform from a liability to a force. A year after allowing 271 passing yards per game, 124th in the nation, the Cougars defense now boasts South Dakota State transfer safeties Tucker Large, Matt Durrance and Cale Reeder. They profile as a group that can drag that number down in meaningful ways.

Under defensive coordinator Jesse Bobbit, whose 2024 SDSU unit led the FCS ranks in scoring defense (13.9 ppg), the Cougars' linebacker corps also looks poised to take a step forward. Returners Keith Brown and Parker McKenna are ready to turn backup roles into starting jobs, and Washington State will also get a boost from transfer defensive linemen Max Baloun (South Dakota State) and Soni Finau (FCS Cal Poly).

SPECIALISTS Returning kickers Ryan Harris and Connor Calvert are in the race for the Cougars' starting job, as is SDSU transfer Jack Stevens. Longtime WSU kicker Dean Janikowski has graduated, and punter Nick Haberer transferred to Vanderbilt, so expect punting duties to go to Harris or transfer Dylan Mauro.

FINAL ANALYSIS WSU is entering a new era, with the flash of the Air Raid gone and the sturdiness of a run attack in place. Rogers is depending on a plethora of South Dakota State transfers to acclimate themselves well to the FBS level and help the Cougs navigate a quasi-independent slate that features road contests against Ole Miss and Virginia. How they fare in that endeavor may swing WSU's inaugural season under Rogers.

2024 RESULTS (8-5)

Aug. 31	Portland State	W	70-30
Sept. 7	Texas Tech	W	37-16
Sept. 14	Washington	W	24-19
Sept. 20	San José State (ot)	W	54-52
Sept. 28	at Boise State	L	24-45
Oct. 12	at Fresno State	W	25-17
Oct. 19	Hawai'i	W	42-10
Oct. 26	at San Diego State	W	29-26
Nov. 9	Utah State	W	49-28
Nov. 16	at New Mexico	L	35-38
Nov. 23	at Oregon State	L	38-41
Nov. 30	Wyoming	L	14-15
Dec. 27	vs. Syracuse #	L	35-52

#Holiday Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Idaho
Sept. 6	San Diego State
Sept. 13	at North Texas
Sept. 20	Washington
Sept. 27	at Colorado State
Oct. 11	at Ole Miss
Oct. 18	at Virginia
Oct. 25	Toledo
Nov. 1	at Oregon State
Nov. 15	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 22	at James Madison
Nov. 29	Oregon State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sullivan Schlimgen, LB	★★★★
2.	Devin Ellison, WR	★★★
3.	Jovan Clark, LB	★★★
4.	Owen Eshelman, QB	★★★
5.	Turner Bertrand, OT	★★★
6.	Damarius Russell, S	★★★
7.	Brody Miller, S	★★★
8.	David Kuku, CB	★★★
9.	Kyle Peterson, S	★★★
10.	Donovan Fitzmaurice, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jimmy Rogers • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: 27-3 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Danny Freund
Defensive Coordinator: Jesse Bobbit • Location: Pullman, Wash.
Stadium: Martin Stadium (32,952)

SEC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. TEXAS LONGHORNS
2. GEORGIA BULLDOGS
3. LSU TIGERS
4. ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE
5. FLORIDA GATORS
6. SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS
7. OLE MISS REBELS
8. TEXAS A&M AGGIES
9. OKLAHOMA SOONERS
10. TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS
11. AUBURN TIGERS
12. MISSOURI TIGERS
13. ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS
14. VANDERBILT COMMODORES
15. KENTUCKY WILDCATS
16. MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP

TEXAS OVER GEORGIA

ALL-SEC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	ARCH MANNING	Texas
RB	AHMAD HARDY	Missouri
RB	JAYDN OTT	Oklahoma
AP	KC CONCEPCION	Texas A&M
WR	RYAN WILLIAMS	Alabama
WR	CAM COLEMAN	Auburn
WR	DEION BURKS	Oklahoma
TE	ELI STOWERS	Vanderbilt
C	JAKE SLAUGHTER	Florida
OL	PARKER BRAILSFORD	Alabama
OL	AR'MAJ REED-ADAMS	Texas A&M
OL	KADYN PROCTOR	Alabama
OL	CAYDEN GREEN	Missouri

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	DYLAN STEWART	South Carolina
DL	COLIN SIMMONS	Texas
DL	LT OVERTON	Alabama
DL	KELDRIC FAULK	Auburn
LB	SUNTARINE PERKINS	Ole Miss
LB	ANTHONY HILL JR.	Texas
LB	WHIT WEEKS	LSU
LB	TAUREAN YORK	Texas A&M
CB	JERMOD McCOY	Tennessee
CB	MALIK MUHAMMAD	Texas
S	KJ BOLDEN	Georgia
S	MICHAEL TAAFEE	Texas

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	PEYTON WOODRING	Georgia
P	BRETT THORSON	Georgia
KR	BARION BROWN	LSU
PR	KAM SHANKS	Arkansas

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Gasparilla: Missouri vs. Virginia Tech

Birmingham: Arkansas vs. South Florida

Liberty: Auburn vs. Kansas

Independence: Vanderbilt vs. TCU

Music City: Tennessee vs. Illinois

Reliaquest: South Carolina vs. Iowa

Cheez-It Citrus: Florida vs. Michigan

Gator: Texas A&M vs. SMU

Duke's Mayo: Ole Miss vs. Georgia Tech

College Football Playoff First Round: Georgia vs. Miami (Fla.)

College Football Playoff First Round: LSU vs. Alabama

Orange (CFP quarterfinals): Georgia vs. Clemson

Sugar (CFP quarterfinals): Texas vs. LSU

Fiesta (CFP semifinals): Texas vs. Ohio State

Peach (CFP semifinals): Georgia vs. Penn State

National Championship: Texas vs. Penn State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

ALABAMA
Offense: New: Ryan Grubb, Nick Sheridan, JaMarcus Shephard
Old: Nick Sheridan, JaMarcus Shephard

AUBURN
Defense: New: DJ Durkin
Old: DJ Durkin, Charles Kelly

DJ DURKIN, AUBURN

FLORIDA
Defense: New: New: Robert Bala, Ron Roberts, Vinnie Sunseri
Old: Austin Armstrong, Ron Roberts

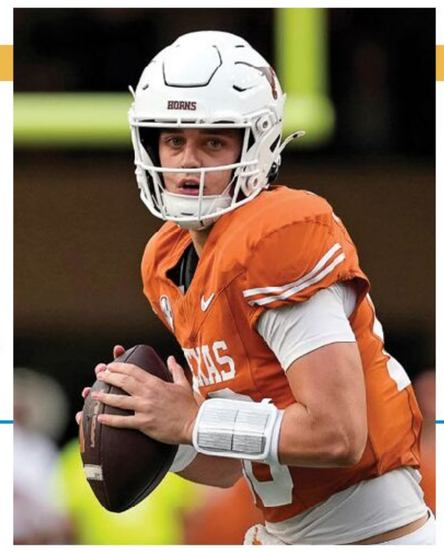
OKLAHOMA
Offense: New: Ben Arbuckle
Old: Joe Jon Finley (interim)
Defense: New: Brent Venables
Old: Zac Alley, Todd Bates

SOUTH CAROLINA
Offense: New: Mike Shula
Old: Dowell Loggains

MIKE SHULA, SOUTH CAROLINA

VANDERBILT
Defense: New: Steve Gregory, Nick Lezynski
Old: Clark Lea

CLCOKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCOTT WACHTER-IMAGN IMAGES; DANIEL DUNN-IMAGN IMAGES; ROBERT SUTTON / TUSCALOOSA NEWS; JAKE CRANDALL



ARCH MANNING, TEXAS
AHMAD HARDY, MISSOURI

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	John Mateer	QB	Oklahoma	Washington State
	The dual-threat Mateer is an instant upgrade under center for the Sooners.			
2.	Damon Wilson II	Edge	Missouri	Georgia
	Wilson, a former 5-star prospect, has shown he can rush the passer in the SEC.			
3.	Eric Singleton Jr.	WR	Auburn	Georgia Tech
	Speedster caught more than 100 passes across two seasons at Georgia Tech.			
4.	Patrick Payton	DL	LSU	Florida State
	A proven disruptor with SEC size, Payton has 26 career starts to his name.			
5.	Jackson Arnold	QB	Auburn	Oklahoma
	Arnold gets a fresh start in Hugh Freeze's quarterback-friendly offense.			
6.	Ahmad Hardy	RB	Missouri	ULM
	Hardy had a nose for the end zone and displayed big-play ability as a true freshman.			
7.	KC Concepcion	WR	Texas A&M	NC State
	Conception is a proven commodity with 18 career touchdowns.			
8.	Nic Anderson	WR	LSU	Oklahoma
	Anderson broke OU records as a freshman, but a quad injury sidelined him in '24.			
9.	Zachariah Branch	WR	Georgia	USC
	Branch addresses a position of need — and he excels on special teams.			
10.	Jaydn Ott	RB	Oklahoma	Cal
	Ott is a dual-threat back who should complement Mateer effectively.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Texas (1)
2. Georgia (2)
3. Alabama (3)
4. Texas A&M (7)
5. Auburn (8)
6. LSU (9)
7. Tennessee (10)
8. Florida (11)
9. Missouri (16)
10. Oklahoma (17)
11. South Carolina (18)
12. Ole Miss (19)
13. Mississippi State (22)
14. Kentucky (28)
15. Arkansas (29)
16. Vanderbilt (71)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Aug. 30	Texas at Ohio State	Oct. 25	Alabama at South Carolina
Aug. 30	LSU at Clemson	Nov. 8	LSU at Alabama
Sept. 27	Alabama at Georgia	Nov. 15	Texas at Georgia
Oct. 11	South Carolina at LSU	Nov. 22	Tennessee at Florida
Oct. 18	Tennessee at Alabama	Nov. 29	Texas A&M at Texas
Oct. 18	Ole Miss at Georgia	Nov. 29	Alabama at Auburn

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Keelon Russell	QB	Alabama	★★★★★+	2
2.	Elijah Griffin	DL	Georgia	★★★★★+	3
3.	Lance Jackson	EDGE	Texas	★★★★★	5
4.	Michael Fasusi	OT	Oklahoma	★★★★★+	7
5.	Isaiah Gibson	EDGE	Georgia	★★★★★+	8
6.	David Sanders Jr.	OT	Tennessee	★★★★★+	9
7.	DJ Pickett	CB	LSU	★★★★★+	10
8.	Michael Carroll	IOL	Alabama	★★★★★	11
9.	Jonah Williams	S	Texas	★★★★★+	15
10.	Jackson Lloyd	OT	Alabama	★★★★★	16

Rankings per On3; +Consensus 5-star prospect

ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 8 | SEC PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE Addition by subtraction? That's the question for Alabama as it transitions away from Jalen Milroe at quarterback after two seasons. Milroe's electric running ability, especially in the red zone, was a staple of the Tide's offense the past two seasons. But the passing game was inconsistent and a far cry from what Bryce Young, Mac Jones and Tua Tagovailoa had produced in previous seasons.

Head coach Kalen DeBoer spent the spring evaluating his three options to replace Milroe — fourth-year junior Ty Simpson, third-year sophomore Austin Mack and 5-star freshman Keelon Russell — and said he wanted a "playmaker" and not just a game manager. DeBoer is also reunited with offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb, who called plays for a Washington attack that produced some of the nation's top passing numbers behind Michael Penix Jr. If Alabama can find a more capable passer to replace Milroe, it has one of the most talented receiver rooms in the country — led by superstar Ryan Williams — to catch those passes.

DEFENSE Alabama returns much of its starting defense from last season, the result of several players opting out of the NFL Draft to play an additional year in college. That gives second-year coordinator Kane Wommack a solid base to build upon with a group that improved as the 2024 season progressed. Alabama's defense struggled in a loss to Vanderbilt last season, but it was hard to blame that side of the ball for losses against Tennessee, Oklahoma or Michigan.

Getting linebacker Deontae Lawson (torn ACL) and safety Keon Sabb (broken foot) back after season-ending injuries will be a big boost for a unit that is loaded with veterans and potential 2026 NFL Draft picks.

SPECIALISTS Alabama will have a new group of specialists in 2025. Replacing James Burnip, who became one of the nation's best punters, will be the biggest challenge, and the Tide plucked Colorado School of Mines punter Blake Doud from Division II as one option. Conor Talty, one of the nation's top high school kickers two years ago, will get his chance for Alabama after sitting behind Will Reichard and then Graham Nicholson the past two seasons. Cal transfer David Bird is the new long-snapper.

FINAL ANALYSIS Alabama fans were willing to cut Kalen DeBoer some slack for a 9-4 debut season after he navigated a transition from Nick Saban that shocked players and sent some key pieces to the transfer portal. But there is only so much patience in Tuscaloosa, where winning national championships is the standard. There is greater comfort and stability around Alabama in 2025, but expectations have risen accordingly.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 SEC)

Aug. 31	WKU	W	63-0
Sept. 7	South Florida	W	42-16
Sept. 14	at Wisconsin	W	42-10
Sept. 28	Georgia	W	41-34
Oct. 5	at Vanderbilt	L	35-40
Oct. 12	South Carolina	W	27-25
Oct. 19	at Tennessee	L	17-24
Oct. 26	Missouri	W	34-0
Nov. 9	at LSU	W	42-13
Nov. 16	Mercer	W	52-7
Nov. 23	at Oklahoma	L	3-24
Nov. 30	Auburn	W	28-14
Dec. 31	vs. Michigan #	L	13-19

#ReliaQuest Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Florida State
Sept. 6	ULM
Sept. 13	Wisconsin
Sept. 27	at Georgia
Oct. 4	Vanderbilt
Oct. 11	at Missouri
Oct. 18	Tennessee
Oct. 25	at South Carolina
Nov. 8	LSU
Nov. 15	Oklahoma
Nov. 22	Eastern Illinois
Nov. 29	at Auburn

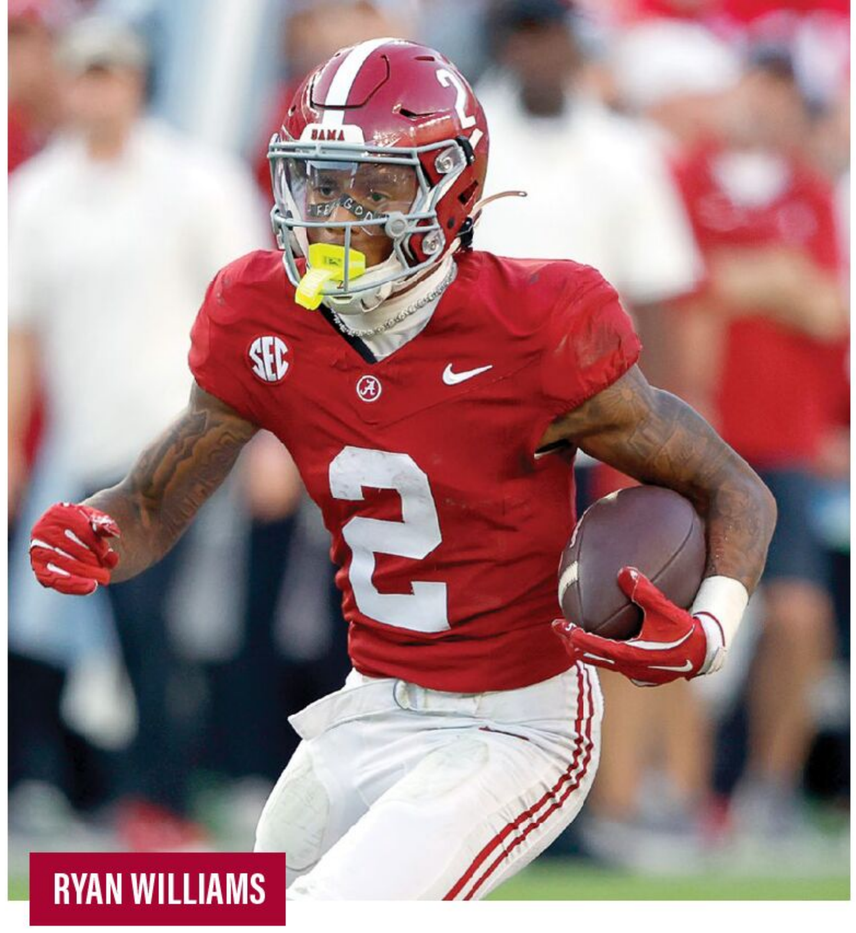
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Keelon Russell, QB	★★★★★
2.	Michael Carroll, IOL	★★★★★
3.	Jackson Lloyd, OT	★★★★★
4.	Dijon Lee Jr., CB	★★★★
5.	Lotzeir Brooks, WR	★★★★
6.	Justin Hill, EDGE	★★★★
7.	AK Dear, RB	★★★★
8.	Chuck McDonald III, CB	★★★★
9.	Kaleb Edwards, TE	★★★★
10.	Ivan Taylor, S	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalen DeBoer • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year) • Career Record: 113-16 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Ryan Grubb, Nick Sheridan, JaMarcus Shephard • Defensive Coordinator: Kane Wommack
Location: Tuscaloosa, Ala. • Stadium: Bryant-Denny Stadium (100,077)



RYAN WILLIAMS

SCOUTING THE TIDE

"The expectations define this place. I think you'll see a competitive program that could end up in Atlanta and make the playoff, but this is a new era. Bama's not a surefire lock every season. The good news for them is that you didn't see a lot of key pieces test their market value in the portal. I think Alabama got very serious about NIL and personnel very quickly. Ryan Grubb coming over will make the offense better. [Nick] Sheridan's going to focus on development; he helped find and develop [Michael] Penix [Jr.] at Indiana. ... The biggest question will be quarterback, obviously, but they have a really solid offensive line, and the roster doesn't have any obvious holes to fill. They're going to compete for a playoff spot for sure."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	**GERMIE BERNARD (SR.)**	7	Cole Adams (So.)
WR	2	**RYAN WILLIAMS (SO.)**	11	Rico Scott (Fr.)
WR	1	Isaiah Horton (Jr.)	8	Jalen Hale (So.)
LT	74	**KADYN PROCTOR (JR.)**	73	Olaus Alinen (So.)
LG	56	Geno VanDeMark (Sr.)	71	Kam Dewberry (Sr.)
C	72	**PARKER BRAILSFORD (JR.)**	69	Joseph Ionata (Fr.)
RG	77	**JAEDEN ROBERTS (SR.)**	70	William Sanders (Fr.)
RT	75	Wilkin Formby (So.)	64	Michael Carroll (Fr)
TE	80	Josh Cuevas (Sr.)	87	Danny Lewis Jr. (Jr.)
QB	15	Ty Simpson (Jr.)	10	Austin Mack (So.)
RB	26	**JAM MILLER (SR.)**	9	Richard Young (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	22	LT Overton (Sr.)	11	Jordan Renaud (So.)
DT	96	**TIM KEENAN III (SR.)**	92	Jeremiah Beaman (Fr.)
DT	23	James Smith (Jr.)	94	Edric Hill (So.)
OLB	4	Qua Russaw (So.)	20	**JAH-MARIEN LATHAM (SR.)**
ILB	0	**DEONTAE LAWSON (SR.)**	41	Nikhai Hill-Green (Sr.)
ILB	10	Justin Jefferson (Sr.)	30	Cayden Jones (So.)
CB	1	**DOMANI JACKSON (SR.)**	5	Dijon Lee Jr. (Fr.)
CB	2	**ZABIEN BROWN (SO.)**	9	Cam Calhoun (So.)
HUSKY	7	DaShawn Jones (Sr.)	21	Dre Kirkpatrick Jr. (So.)
S	18	**BRAY HUBBARD (JR.)**	13	Ivan Taylor (Fr.)
S	3	**KEON SABB (JR.)**	12	Zavier Mincey (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	31	Conor Talty (So.)	KR	2	Ryan Williams (So.)
P	38	Blake Doud (Sr.)	PR	7	Cole Adams (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

BUTCH DILL-IMAGN IMAGES

TAYLEN GREEN

NELSON CHENAULT-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE RAZORBACKS

"Last year, they did just enough to keep [Sam] Pittman off the hot seat, but it will be just as difficult this season. Sam has a ton of respect, but this roster isn't going to separate them. ... They need better offensive line play, and they don't have SEC-level talent up front on defense. The receivers are solid, and [Taylen] Green is solid, but they couldn't protect him, and they would get into trouble in third-and-obvious situations. ... I don't think they're competing at a top level in NIL right now. You look at the portal exits, and it's really hard for a mid- to low-tier program in this league to sustain bowl eligibility with this many extra holes to fill. ... If they can find a better O-line, I think the offense can carry them back to that six- or seven-win level."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	9	O'Mega Blake (Sr.)	11	Monte Harrison (So.)
WR	6	Raylen Sharpe (Sr.)	15	Kam Shanks (So.)
WR	84	Ismael Cisse (So.)	17	CJ Brown (So.)
LT	51	Corey Robinson II (Sr.)	75	Kavion Broussard (Fr.)
LG	**55**	**FERNANDO CARMONA (SR.)**	78	Bubba Craig (So.)
C	52	Caden Kitler (Jr.)	73	Brooks Edmondson (Jr.)
RG	**76**	**E'MARION HARRIS (JR.)**	50	Kobe Branham (Fr.)
RT	71	Shaq McRoy (Fr.)	**54**	**KEYSHAWN BLACKSTOCK (SR.)**
TE	88	Rohan Jones (Sr.)	81	Andreas Paaske (Sr.)
QB	**10**	**TAYLEN GREEN (SR.)**	7	KJ Jackson (Fr.)
RB	0	Braylen Russell (So.)	4	Mike Washington Jr. (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	97	Quincy Rhodes Jr. (Jr.)	9	Charlie Collins (So.)
DT	**5**	**CAMERON BALL (SR.)**	95	Ian Geffrard (So.)
DE	98	Danny Saili (Sr.)	92	David Oke (Sr.)
OLB	**10**	**XAVIAN SOREY JR. (SR.)**	7	Bradley Shaw (So.)
ILB	**14**	**STEPHEN DIX JR. (SR.)**	25	Tavion Wallace (Fr.)
OLB	7	Bradley Shaw (So.)		Trent Whalen (Sr.)
CB	15	Jaheim Singletary (Jr.)		Julian Neal (Sr.)
CB	2	Selman Bridges (So.)	13	Kani Walker (Sr.)
NB	3	Larry Worth III (Sr.)	20	JJ Shelton (Fr.)
S	16	Miguel Mitchell (Jr.)	27	Ahkhari Johnson (So.)
S	22	Caleb Wooden (Sr.)	8	Quentavius Scandrett (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	35	Scott Starzyk (Fr.)	KR	1 Rodney Hill (Jr.)
P	37	Devin Bale (Sr.)	PR	15 Kam Shanks (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 39 | SEC PREDICTION: 13 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Senior quarterback Taylen Green is back for a second tour through the Bobby Petrino playbook. Petrino is convinced that Green is better suited to read defenses and will be more decisive and productive.

Green is likely to be the only offensive player to return to his 2024 position, as tackles Fernando Carmona and E'Marion Harris shift inside with transfers expected to start at left tackle (Corey Robinson II, Georgia Tech), center (Caden Kitler, UCF) and right tackle (Shaq McRoy, Oregon).

Transfer running back Mike Washington Jr. (New Mexico State) had a big spring in a corps that includes Braylen Russell, Rodney Hill and AJ Green. The top receiving targets are to be determined. Returners CJ Brown and Monte Harrison and transfers O'Mega Blake (Charlotte), Ismael Cisse (Stanford), Raylen Sharpe (Fresno State), Kam Shanks (UAB) and Courtney Crutchfield (Missouri) had big moments in spring, and freshmen Antonio Jordan and Jace Brown have a chance to impress in camp. Transfer tight ends Rohan Jones (FCS Montana State) and Jaden Platt (Texas A&M) boost a spot with Andreas Paaske and Maddox Lassiter returning.

DEFENSE Arkansas has a ton of newcomers to blend with the returning starters, tackle Cameron Ball and linebackers Stephen Dix Jr. and Xavian Sorey Jr. Coordinator Travis Williams might base from a 3-3 or a 4-2 front. The portal acquisitions will go a long way in providing an answer. Linemen Quincy Rhodes Jr., Ian Geffrard and Danny Saili got extensive spring reps. Transfers David Oke (FCS Abilene Christian), Justus Boone (Florida), Phillip Lee (Troy) and Ken Talley (Michigan State) could all be factors.

Coaches believe sophomore linebacker Bradley Shaw has a big upside. Transfer Trent Whalen (FCS Southern Utah) should earn playing time.

Jaheim Singletary and Selman Bridges hold starting roles at corner, though challenges could arise from transfers. Larry Worth III has emerged as a team leader and top nickelback. Leading safeties are Miguel Mitchell, Caleb Wooden, Quentavius Scandrett, Ahkhari Johnson and transfer Shakur Smalls (FCS Maine).

SPECIALISTS Senior Devin Bale returns as one of the best punters in the FBS. Freshman Scott Starzyk comes in as one of the highest-rated kickers in the country. Shanks had two punt return touchdowns last season at UAB. Hill is the likely kickoff returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Arkansas had as much personnel turnover as any team in the SEC (if not more), so finding some cohesion during training camp on both sides of the ball is essential. Sixth-year head coach Sam Pittman says he likes the camaraderie, physicality and speed of the team.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SEC)

Aug. 29	vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff #	W	70-0
Sept. 7	at Oklahoma State (ot)	L	31-39
Sept. 14	UAB	W	37-27
Sept. 21	at Auburn	W	24-14
Sept. 28	vs. Texas A&M %	L	17-21
Oct. 5	Tennessee	W	19-14
Oct. 19	LSU	L	10-34
Oct. 26	at Mississippi State	W	58-25
Nov. 2	Ole Miss	L	31-63
Nov. 16	Texas	L	10-20
Nov. 23	Louisiana Tech	W	35-14
Nov. 30	at Missouri	L	21-28
Dec. 27	vs. Texas Tech &	W	39-26

#Little Rock, AR %Arlington, TX &Liberty Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Alabama A&M
Sept. 6	vs. Arkansas St. #
Sept. 13	at Ole Miss
Sept. 20	at Memphis
Sept. 27	Notre Dame
Oct. 11	at Tennessee
Oct. 18	Texas A&M
Oct. 25	Auburn
Nov. 1	Mississippi State
Nov. 15	at LSU
Nov. 22	at Texas
Nov. 29	Missouri

#Little Rock, AR

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Caleb Bell, DL	★★★★
2.	Tavion Wallace, LB	★★★★
3.	Keshawn Davila, CB	★★★★
4.	Keiundre Johnson, EDGE	★★★
5.	Trent Sellers, EDGE	★★★
6.	Kevin Oatis, DL	★★★
7.	Grayson Wilson, QB	★★★
8.	Taijh Overton, S	★★★
9.	Bubba Craig, IOL	★★★
10	Jace Brown, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sam Pittman • Record at School: 30-31 (5 years)
Career Record: 30-31 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bobby Petrino
Defensive Coordinator: Travis Williams • Location: Fayetteville, Ark.
Stadium: Donald W. Williams Razorback Stadium (76,212)

AUBURN TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 31 | SEC PREDICTION: 11 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 2-6 SEC

OFFENSE After ranking 71st nationally in offense in each of head coach Hugh Freeze's first two seasons on The Plains, Auburn expects to take a significant jump on offense. Quarterback Jackson Arnold didn't pan out at Oklahoma, but Freeze and the Tigers have high hopes for the former top-5 recruit.

Arnold will throw to an upgraded receiver group that adds transfers Eric Singleton Jr. (Georgia Tech) and Horatio Fields (Wake Forest), alongside talented sophomores Cam Coleman and Malcolm Simmons. Coleman tied for the team lead with eight touchdown receptions as a freshman.

Up front, Auburn returns strong interior players in center Connor Lew, guard Jeremiah Wright and Dillon Wade, who started at left tackle in 2024 but moves inside with the addition of Xavier Chaplin (Virginia Tech).

Running back Jarquez Hunter is a big loss, and Auburn likely will replace his production with several ball-carriers, including veteran Damari Alston and UConn transfer Durell Robinson. Brandon Frazier and Maryland transfer Preston Howard will compete at tight end.

DEFENSE Auburn's defense ranked 28th nationally in points allowed (21.3 ppg) and tied for ninth in yards allowed per rushing attempt (3.08 ypc) in 2024. The secondary returns Kaleb Harris, Kayin Lee, Sylvester Smith and Champ Anthony and adds Miami (Ohio) transfer Raion Strader, the MAC's top cornerback in 2024, and Tulane transfer Rayshawn Pleasant.

Auburn returns a premier pass-rusher in Keldric Faulk, who tied for the team lead in sacks (seven) and finished second in tackles for a loss (11) last fall. Faulk and Keyron Crawford, who plays the Buck linebacker spot, could form a disruptive tandem. Auburn needs tackles Quientrail Jamison-Travis, Malik Blocton and others to be stout against the run.

The linebacker spot also has some questions as leading tackler Dorian Mausi Jr. and gifted pass-rusher Jalen McLeod are both gone. Maryland transfer Caleb Wheatland enters the mix alongside key holdovers like junior Robert Woodyard Jr. and sophomore Demarcus Riddick.

SPECIALISTS Alex McPherson is set to resume full-time placekicking duties after missing much of '24 with ulcerative colitis. Oklahoma State transfer Hudson Kaak takes over punting duties. Talented kickoff returner Jeremiah Cobb is back, although the speedy Singleton could be a factor.

FINAL ANALYSIS Auburn's best portal offseason, along with key retentions, has given Freeze a chance to break through in Year 3. If Arnold and the offense can't take a step after adding Singleton and others, there's a bigger problem going on. If Auburn wins a huge opener at Baylor, it could start strong and have a redemptive season under Freeze.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 2-6 SEC)

Aug. 31	Alabama A&M	W	73-3
Sept. 7	Cal	L	14-21
Sept. 14	New Mexico	W	45-19
Sept. 21	Arkansas	L	14-24
Sept. 28	Oklahoma	L	21-27
Oct. 5	at Georgia	L	13-31
Oct. 19	at Missouri	L	17-21
Oct. 26	at Kentucky	W	24-10
Nov. 2	Vanderbilt	L	7-17
Nov. 16	ULM	W	48-14
Nov. 23	Texas A&M (ot)	W	43-41
Nov. 30	at Alabama	L	14-28

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Baylor
Sept. 6	Ball State
Sept. 13	South Alabama
Sept. 20	at Oklahoma
Sept. 27	at Texas A&M
Oct. 11	Georgia
Oct. 18	Missouri
Oct. 25	at Arkansas
Nov. 1	Kentucky
Nov. 8	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 22	Mercer
Nov. 29	Alabama

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Deuce Knight, QB	★★★★★
2.	Broderick Shull, OT	★★★★
3.	AnQuon Fegans, S	★★★★
4.	Malik Autry, DL	★★★★
5.	Jared Smith, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Eric Winters, S	★★★★
7.	Donovan Starr, CB	★★★★
8.	J.J. Faulk, LB	★★★★
9.	Derick Smith, ATH	★★★★
10.	Elijah Melendez, LB	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Hugh Freeze • Record at School: 11-14 (2 years) • Career Record: 87-61 (14 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Derrick Nix • Defensive Coordinator: DJ Durkin • Location: Auburn, Ala. • Stadium: Jordan-Hare Stadium (88,043)

CAM COLEMAN

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Watch out here — they finally have a quarterback who can run [Hugh] Freeze's system, and they've done some really impressive work in the portal. They're not an elite team by any stretch, but this is the most complete roster Freeze has put together since he got there. ... They finally have a quarterback, honestly. [Jackson] Arnold is not a world-beater, you can rattle him, but he's a Day 1 upgrade, and the receiving room is really deep. The Georgia Tech kid [Eric Singleton Jr.] is a legit baller and a big get. This offense is going to be better, and that's going to help that defense a lot more. [DJ] Durkin's done a really good job with these guys, and it's what kept them in a lot of their games last year. ... I think this is a turnaround year for these guys, and they're definitely bowling."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	**8**	**CAM COLEMAN (SO.)**	5	Horatio Fields (Sr.)
WR	1	Eric Singleton Jr. (Jr.)	18	Sam Turner (Fr.)
WR	4	Malcolm Simmons (So.)	6	Bryce Cain (Fr.)
LT	65	Xavier Chaplin (Jr.)	79	Tyler Johnson (So.)
LG	**52**	**DILLON WADE (SR.)**	78	DeAndre Carter (Fr.)
C	**75**	**CONNOR LEW (JR.)**	71	Dylan Senda (So.)
RG	**77**	**JEREMIAH WRIGHT (SR.)**	78	DeAndre Carter (Fr.)
RT	76	Mason Murphy (Sr.)	**72**	**IZAVION MILLER (SR.)**
TE	87	Brandon Frazier (Sr.)	15	Preston Howard (Jr.)
QB	11	Jackson Arnold (Jr.)		Ashton Daniels (Sr.)
RB	0	Damari Alston (Sr.)	21	Durell Robinson (So.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	**15**	**KELDRIC FAULK (JR.)**	10	Amaris Williams (So.)
DT	97	Quientrail Jamison-Travis (Sr.)	95	Jourdin Crawford (Fr.)
DT	47	Malik Blocton (So.)	91	Zykeivous Walker (Sr.)
BUCK	**24**	**KEYRON CRAWFORD (SR.)**	3	Chris Murray (Sr.)
LB		Caleb Wheatland (Sr.)	0	Robert Woodyard Jr. (Jr.)
CB	23	Jay Crawford (So.)		Rayshawn Pleasant (Jr.)
CB	**4**	**KAYIN LEE (JR.)**	12	Blake Woodby (Fr.)
NB	13	Raion Strider (Jr.)	1	Champ Anthony (Jr.)
S	**8**	**KALEB HARRIS (SO.)**	30	Jahquez Robinson (Sr.)
S	19	Sylvester Smith (So.)	21	AnQuon Fegans (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	38	Alex McPherson (Jr.)	**KR** 23	Jeremiah Cobb (Jr.)
P	14	Hudson Kaak (Jr.)	**PR** 4	Malcolm Simmons (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JAY BIGGERSTAFF-IMAGN IMAGES

DJ LAGWAY

SCOUTING THE GATORS

"If [DJ] Lagway continues to develop and stays healthy, they're going to continue to improve. They don't have a killer at receiver, but they're solid at running back. Defensively, they're young, but they've finally got some guys in there that look elite. ... This is a massive year for [Billy] Napier. He survived because of the changing politics of the game and his buyout, but it ended up working out last season. Now he can show positive momentum with this group and start competing for the postseason. Lagway and that offensive line are legit enough to bring back a true 'Florida offense.' If they can be in the hunt for a playoff bid and start scoring points like those old Gator programs, I think he'll be off the hot seat for a while. Lagway could compete with Arch [Manning] for best QB in the league."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	6	Dallas Wilson (Fr.)	**22**	**KAHLEIL JACKSON (SR.)**
WR	**3**	**EUGENE WILSON III (SO.)**	8	Vernell Brown III (Fr.)
WR	9	J. Michael Sturdivant (Sr.)	11	Aidan Mizell (So.)
LT	**58**	**AUSTIN BARBER (SR.)**	68	Fletcher Westphal (Fr.)
LG	**77**	**KNIJEAH HARRIS (JR.)**	71	Roderick Kearney (So.)
C	**66**	**JAKE SLAUGHTER (SR.)**	50	Jason Zandamela (So.)
RG	**70**	**DAMIEON GEORGE JR. (SR.)**	75	Kamryn Waites (Sr.)
RT	53	Bryce Lovett (So.)	57	Devon Manuel (Sr.)
TE	**89**	**HAYDEN HANSEN (JR.)**	86	Tony Livingston (Jr.)
QB	**2**	**DJ LAGWAY (SO.)**	15	Harrison Bailey (Sr.)
RB	13	Jadan Baugh (So.)	24	Ja'Kobi Jackson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**94**	**TYREAK SAPP (SR.)**	24	Kamran James (Jr.)
NT	95	Jamari Lyons (Jr.)	93	Michai Boireau (So.)
DT	**88**	**CALEB BANKS (SR.)**	33	Brien Taylor Jr. (Sr.)
LB	5	Myles Graham (So.)	8	Aaron Chiles (So.)
LB	**10**	**GRAYSON HOWARD (JR.)**	29	Jaden Robinson (Jr.)
JACK	34	George Gumbs Jr. (Sr.)	17	LJ McCray (So.)
CB	28	Devin Moore (Sr.)	12	Ben Hanks III (Fr.)
CB	27	Dijon Johnson (Jr.)	25	Cormani McClain (So.)
STAR	0	Sharif Denson (Jr.)	13	Aaron Gates (So.)
S	**14**	**JORDAN CASTELL (JR.)**	2	Lagonza Hayward (Fr.)
S	**18**	**BRYCE THORNTON (JR.)**	9	Drake Stubbs (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Trey Smack (Sr.)	KR	13	Jadan Baugh (So.)
P	19	Tommy Doman (Sr.)	PR	8	Vernell Brown III (Fr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MELINA MYERS-IMAGN IMAGES

FLORIDA GATORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 11 | SEC PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 SEC

OFFENSE DJ Lagway, the nation's No. 1 quarterback prospect in 2024, will be a Heisman Trophy candidate — if healthy. Shoulder soreness prevented him from throwing this spring after a season in which he went 6-1 with 12 40-yard completions and a 154.9 passer rating (second in the SEC). Backup Harrison Bailey, a Louisville transfer at his fourth school, is capable. But Lagway is transcendent.

Playmakers abound in Gainesville. Tailbacks Jadan Baugh and Ja'Kobi Jackson are physical and explosive. Sophomore wide receiver Eugene Wilson III, who returns from hip surgery, can score from anywhere. Dallas Wilson drew Jeremiah Smith comparisons after a spring game-record 10 catches, and fellow true freshman Vernell Brown III is another home-run threat. UCLA transfer wide receiver J. Michael Sturdivant (6-3, 216) and tight end Hayden Hansen (6-8, 271) have NFL measurables.

The 2024 Gators allowed 19 fewer sacks than in '23. All-America center Jake Slaughter anchors an experienced group that features left tackle Austin Barber (26 starts) and right guard Damieon George Jr. (25).

DEFENSE Florida shook off collapses against Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M to become a formidable defense. The Gators totaled 38 tackles for a loss, 19 sacks and 12 takeaways during a closing four-game winning streak led by Tyreak Sapp (a combined eight TFLs, 3.5 sacks). Tackle Caleb Banks boosted his NFL stock with 3.5 sacks during upsets of LSU and Ole Miss. LJ McCray, a 6-foot-6, 267-pound sophomore and the nation's top-rated D-line prospect in 2024, aims to make a Year 2 jump. Nose tackle Jamari Lyons' return from a broken leg is critical, given the lack of interior depth.

Sophomore linebacker Myles Graham is poised to become a star. He and junior Grayson Howard headline a position group as deep as any unit Florida has. Senior cornerback Devin Moore possesses All-SEC tools, but injuries have cost him 19 of 39 games. Third-year safety Jordan Castell, the top returning tackler, leads the back end.

SPECIALISTS Trey Smack's 18 field goals (on 21 tries) included key kicks from 55 yards against LSU and 53 against Ole Miss. Michigan transfer Tommy Doman aims to replace punter Jeremy Crawshaw, who averaged a school-record 46.4 yards per boot for his career.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Billy Napier finally has momentum after ending 2022 and 2023 on losing streaks. The embattled coach also has his best roster in four seasons. A star QB and SEC-level talent must navigate a schedule featuring five teams among the top 20 of the AP's season-ending Top 25, along with trips to LSU and Texas A&M.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 SEC)

Aug. 31	Miami (Fla.)	L	17-41
Sept. 7	Samford	W	45-7
Sept. 14	Texas A&M	L	20-33
Sept. 21	at Mississippi State	W	45-28
Oct. 5	UCF	W	24-13
Oct. 12	at Tennessee (ot)	L	17-23
Oct. 19	Kentucky	W	48-20
Nov. 2	vs. Georgia #	L	20-34
Nov. 9	at Texas	L	17-49
Nov. 16	LSU	W	27-16
Nov. 23	Ole Miss	W	24-17
Nov. 30	at Florida State	W	31-11
Dec. 20	vs. Tulane %	W	33-8

#Jacksonville, FL %Gasparilla Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Long Island
Sept. 6	South Florida
Sept. 13	at LSU
Sept. 20	at Miami (Fla.)
Oct. 4	Texas
Oct. 11	at Texas A&M
Oct. 18	Mississippi State
Nov. 1	vs. Georgia #
Nov. 8	at Kentucky
Nov. 15	at Ole Miss
Nov. 22	Tennessee
Nov. 29	Florida State

#Jacksonville, FL

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ben Hanks III, CB	★★★★★
2.	Lagonza Hayward, S	★★★★
3.	Dallas Wilson, WR	★★★★
4.	Vernell Brown III, WR	★★★★
5.	Drake Stubbs, S	★★★★
6.	Ty Jackson, LB	★★★★
7.	Jalen Wiggins, DL	★★★★
8.	Jayden Woods, EDGE	★★★★
9.	Joseph Mbatchou, DL	★★★★
10.	Byron Louis, RB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Billy Napier • Record at School: 19-19 (3 years) • Career Record: 59-31 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Russ Callaway
Defensive Coordinators: Ron Roberts, Robert Bala, Vinnie Sunseri
Location: Gainesville, Fla. • Stadium: Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (88,548)

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 4 | SEC PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 11-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE A lot of familiar faces are gone, but the Bulldogs do not lack talent. The Bulldogs exited spring without naming a starting quarterback, but Gunner Stockton will be the guy. Ryan Puglisi grew during his first complete spring, but Stockton strengthened his grip.

The receiving corps should be much improved after adding some gifted players via the portal and the 2025 recruiting class. Zachariah Branch, a former 5-star recruit, will man the slot position. Noah Thomas and Colbie Young will handle the X-receiver duties, while Dillon Bell is back as the flanker/do-it-all weapon. The tight end position remains loaded.

At running back, the Bulldogs bring back Nate Frazier, who shined at times as a freshman. Chauncey Bowens had a big G-Day performance, but true freshman Bo Walker had the better overall spring.

The biggest question mark is the offensive line, where the Bulldogs lost four starters. Earnest Greene III and Monroe Freeling will man the tackle spots and serve as leaders.

DEFENSE As usual, Georgia's defense is littered with 5-star talent. It returns a trio of interior defensive linemen — Christen Miller, Jordan Hall and Xzavier McLeod — who have difference-making potential.

Edge is the biggest question mark, as UGA got hit hard by the transfer portal and NFL Draft. It lost two players to each of those destinations, and three of those players were major factors in 2024. Gabe Harris Jr. missed the spring but is the No. 1 edge, followed by Quintavius Johnson. Neither has experienced this big of a role at this level.

Defensive coordinator Glenn Schumann will be able to go four or five deep at inside linebacker. The secondary is also a strength from a talent standpoint. Daylen Everette is the most experienced player on the team, and KJ Bolden is primed for a massive second season.

SPECIALISTS Peyton Woodring is entering his third season at Georgia, and he has quietly been excellent, making 42 of his 48 field-goal attempts. He's not automatic, but he's pretty close. Punter Brett Thorson should be cleared in time for preseason camp after suffering a torn ACL in the SEC Championship Game. If not, sophomore Drew Miller will step up.

FINAL ANALYSIS Georgia remains one of the most talented teams in college football, but for the first time in years, it's not returning the bulk of its major contributors. The season will hinge largely on having a bounce-back season on the offensive side — while breaking in a new quarterback. Finding a run game, something that was missing last season, is a top priority. The defense isn't without warts, but it's loaded with speed and size.

2024 RESULTS (11-3, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 31	vs. Clemson #	W	34-3
Sept. 7	Tennessee Tech	W	48-3
Sept. 14	at Kentucky	W	13-12
Sept. 28	at Alabama	L	34-41
Oct. 5	Auburn	W	31-13
Oct. 12	Mississippi State	W	41-31
Oct. 19	at Texas	W	30-15
Nov. 2	vs. Florida %	W	34-20
Nov. 9	at Ole Miss	L	10-28
Nov. 16	Tennessee	W	31-17
Nov. 23	UMass	W	59-21
Nov. 29	Georgia Tech (ot)	W	44-42
Dec. 7	vs. Texas # (ot)	W	22-19
Jan. 2	vs. Notre Dame &	L	10-23

#Atlanta %Jacksonville, FL &Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Marshall
Sept. 6	Austin Peay
Sept. 13	at Tennessee
Sept. 27	Alabama
Oct. 4	Kentucky
Oct. 11	at Auburn
Oct. 18	Ole Miss
Nov. 1	vs. Florida #
Nov. 8	at Mississippi State
Nov. 15	Texas
Nov. 22	Charlotte
Nov. 29	at Georgia Tech %

#Jacksonville, FL
%Mercedes-Benz Stadium

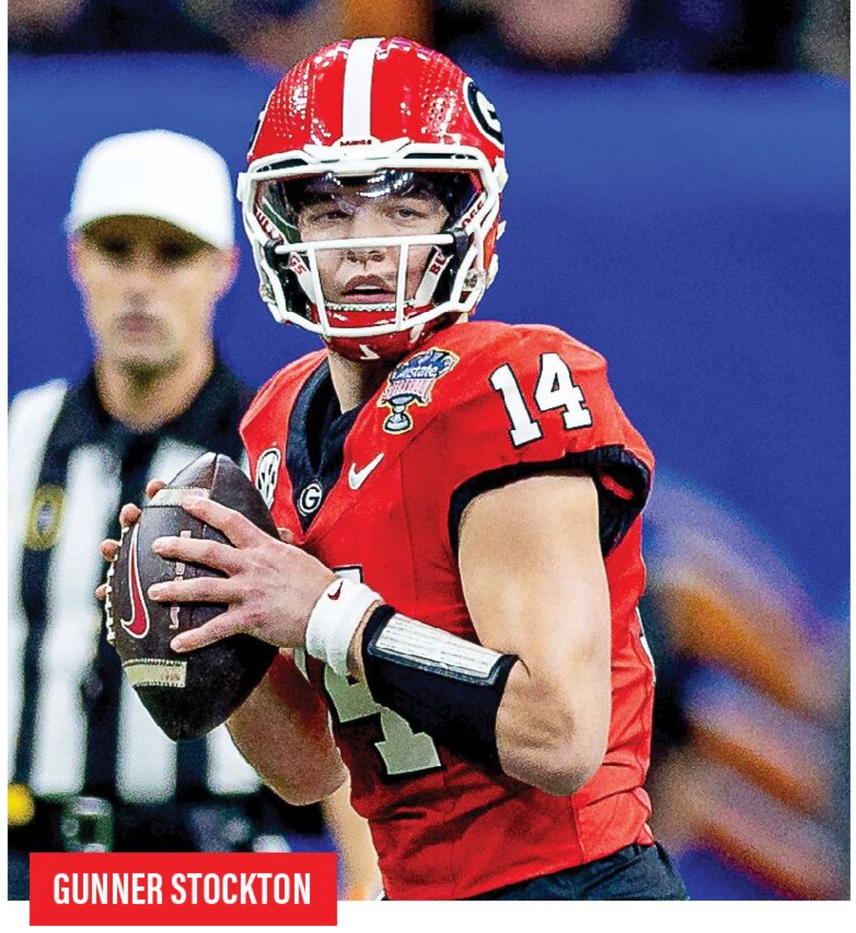
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Elijah Griffin, DL	★★★★★
2.	Isaiah Gibson, EDGE	★★★★★
3.	Talyn Taylor, WR	★★★★★
4.	Elyiss Williams, TE	★★★★
5.	Zayden Walker, LB	★★★★
6.	Dennis Uzochukwu, OT	★★★★
7.	Thomas Blackshear, WR	★★★★
8.	Darren Ikinnagbon, EDGE	★★★★
9.	Juan Gaston, IOL	★★★★
10.	CJ Wiley, WR	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirby Smart • Record at School: 105-19 (9 years)
Career Record: 105-19 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Bobo
Defensive Coordinator: Glenn Schumann • Location: Athens, Ga.
Stadium: Sanford Stadium (93,033)



GUNNER STOCKTON

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"All eyes are on the offense. They have questions at pretty much every position group here. Is [Gunnar] Stockton a legit QB1? Can they replace the offensive line? Can the receiving corps improve? Do they have a guy behind [Nate] Frazier in the backfield? Last season, they looked sort of muddled. Not bad, but you got the idea they weren't confident in one particular area of their attack. ... Defensively, it's still an elite group, but they're thin at linebacker. ... I don't think this is the same level of talent we've seen in the last three or four years. I think you might see a decline, at least at first, on both lines of scrimmage. ... The biggest question mark will be the offense under Stockton. They didn't chase any portal guys, so let's see if the kid can become elite."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	8	Colbie Young (Sr.)	5	Noah Thomas (Sr.)
WR	**86**	**DILLON BELL (SR.)**	16	London Humphreys (Jr.)
WR	1	Zachariah Branch (Jr.)	18	Sacovie White (Fr.)
LT	57	Monroe Freeling (Jr.)	55	Bo Hughley (So.)
LG	56	Micah Morris (Sr.)	73	Juan Gaston (Fr.)
C	74	Drew Bobo (Jr.)	51	Malachi Toliver (Fr.)
RG	75	Daniel Calhoun (Fr.)	52	Michael Uini (Fr.)
RT	**71**	**EARNEST GREENE III (JR.)**	64	Jahzare Jackson (So.)
TE	**4**	**OSCAR DELP (SR.)**	**7**	**LAWSON LUCKIE (JR.)**
QB	14	Gunner Stockton (Jr.)	12	Ryan Puglisi (Fr.)
RB	3	Nate Frazier (So.)	33	Chauncey Bowens (Fr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	99	Joseph Jonah-Ajonye (Fr.)	91	Justin Greene (Fr.)
DT	**52**	**CHRISTEN MILLER (JR.)**	94	Xzavier McLeod (So.)
NT	44	Jordan Hall (Jr.)	95	Nnamdi Ogboko (Fr.)
EDGE	0	Gabe Harris Jr. (Jr.)	33	Quintavius Johnson (So.)
ILB	**3**	**CJ ALLEN (JR.)**	19	Justin Williams (So.)
ILB	5	Raylen Wilson (Jr.)	9	Chris Cole (So.)
STAR	8	Joenel Aguero (Jr.)	14	Adrian Maddox (Sr.)
CB	**6**	**DAYLEN EVERETTE (SR.)**	15	Demello Jones (So.)
CB	7	Daniel Harris (Jr.)	1	Ellis Robinson IV (Fr.)
S	4	KJ Bolden (So.)	22	Todd Robinson (Fr.)
S	20	JaCorey Thomas (Sr.)	2	Zion Branch (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Peyton Woodring (Jr.)	KR	1	Zachariah Branch (Jr.)
P	92	Brett Thorson (Sr.)	PR	1	Zachariah Branch (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

JORDAN LOVETT

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"The recipe for Kentucky's success under [Mark] Stoops isn't there right now, unless they hit on every portal guy they brought in and [Zach] Calzada is significantly better than he was the last time in the league. ... They weren't aggressive or physical on the lines last season. They didn't really play like those Mark Stoops teams that would beat you up. ... Stoops doesn't seem like the guy who's going to radically adjust to win in this NIL and portal era, and it's starting to show up on the field. This is a make-or-break year for the future of this program. He's got a very friendly contract that makes him hard to fire, but right now it's hard to look at the overall roster here and think they're keeping pace with programs like Vanderbilt and South Carolina, who changed with the time."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	9	Ja'Mori Maclin (Sr.)	13	Fred Farrier II (Sr.)
WR	1	Kendrick Law (Sr.)	0	Troy Stellato (Sr.)
WR		Hardley Gilmore (So.)	4	J.J. Hester (Sr.)
LT	73	Shiyazh Pete (Sr.)	71	Malachi Wood (So.)
LG	**52**	**JALEN FARMER (JR.)**	72	Hayes Johnson (Fr.)
C	58	Evan Wibberley (Jr.)	**62**	**JAGER BURTON (SR.)**
RG	75	Joshua Bruan (Sr.)	53	Aba Selm (Fr.)
RT	50	Alex Wollschlaeger (Sr.)	69	Darrin Strey (Fr.)
TE	**84**	**JOSH KATTUS (SR.)**	81	Willie Rodriguez (So.)
QB	5	Zach Calzada (Sr.)	8	Cutter Boley (Fr.)
RB		Seth McGowan (Sr.)	2	Dante Dowdell (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	90	Mi'Quise Humphrey-Grace (Jr.)	95	Jerod Smith II (So.)
DT	60	David Gusta (Sr.)	97	Josaih Hayes (Sr.)
DT	92	Kahlil Saunders (Sr.)	91	Jaden Williams (Jr.)
OLB	11	Kam Olds (Sr.)	2	Sam Greene (So.)
ILB	17	Daveren Rayner (Sr.)	22	Grant Godfrey (So.)
ILB	3	Alex Afari Jr. (Sr.)	9	Landyn Watson (Sr.)
OLB	35	Steven Soles Jr. (So.)	12	Quay'sheed Scott (So.)
CB	5	DJ Waller Jr. (Jr.)	20	Terhyon Nichols (So.)
CB	**6**	**JONQUIS "JQ" HARDAWAY (SR.)**	19	Kevis Thomas (Jr.)
S	**25**	**JORDAN LOVETT (SR.)**	4	Martels Carter Jr. (Fr.)
S	**14**	**TY BRYANT (JR.)**	18	Cam Dooley (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Jacob Kauwe (Fr.)	KR	1 Kendrick Law (Sr.)
P	48	Aidan Laros (Sr.)	PR	9 Ja'Mori Maclin (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

COREY PERRINE/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 46 | SEC PREDICTION: 15 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE Even the most dedicated Kentucky fans might need a roster to identify all the new players who take the field for the offense in the season opener. Guard Jalen Farmer and tight end Josh Kattus are the only returning starters likely to retain their jobs. Transfers are expected to start at quarterback, running back, left tackle, right guard, center, right tackle and two wide receiver spots.

The newcomers are led by former Texas A&M, Auburn and FCS Incarnate Word quarterback Zach Calzada, who will turn 25 in November during his seventh season of college football. Calzada brings a strong arm and the ability to make plays with his legs but was still working on his timing to connect with a group of new receivers during spring practice.

For Kentucky to improve a unit that ranked 114th nationally in total offense last season (330.4 ypg), it will need transfer additions on the offensive line to hit. Left tackle Shiyazh Pete, one of the most high-profile Native American athletes in the country, could be the breakout star.

DEFENSE Kentucky's first-team defense will also look drastically different than in 2024, but there are at least experienced players in the system to plug some of the holes. An injury to first-round NFL Draft pick Maxwell Hairston last season gave Kentucky's young cornerbacks more game experience than expected. Now, the hope is that DJ Waller Jr. and others can use that experience to take a step forward. Kentucky will rely on athleticism at inside linebacker and hope that a host of young defensive linemen are ready to earn spots in the rotation.

There are important transfers to watch, though. Linemen David Gusta (Washington State) and Mi'Quise Humphrey-Grace (FCS South Dakota) ranked as the top two transfers in Kentucky's class. Edge rushers Kam Olds (Kent State) and Sam Greene (USC) will need to improve a pass rush that tied for 64th nationally in sacks per game.

SPECIALISTS Leg strength should be a plus at both kicker and punter, but consistency will be key. Redshirt freshman kicker Jacob Kauwe has big shoes to fill after the departure of Lou Groza Award finalist Alex Raynor. Expect receivers Ja'Mori Maclin and Kendrick Law to handle return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS Pressure is increasing for head coach Mark Stoops after Kentucky's eight-season bowl streak ended with a 4-8 record in 2024. Given the difficulty of the 2025 schedule, reaching bowl eligibility might be the ceiling, but it is unlikely that six wins will be enough to quiet fans about the direction of the program. It is difficult to imagine Kentucky firing its all-time winningest coach with a buyout of more than $40 million owed, but another losing record would lead to plenty of calls for change.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 SEC)

Aug. 31	Southern Miss	W	31-0
Sept. 7	South Carolina	L	6-31
Sept. 14	Georgia	L	12-13
Sept. 21	Ohio	W	41-6
Sept. 28	at Ole Miss	W	20-17
Oct. 12	Vanderbilt	L	13-20
Oct. 19	at Florida	L	20-48
Oct. 26	Auburn	L	10-24
Nov. 2	at Tennessee	L	18-28
Nov. 16	Murray State	W	48-6
Nov. 23	at Texas	L	14-31
Nov. 30	Louisville	L	14-41

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Toledo
Sept. 6	Ole Miss
Sept. 13	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 27	at South Carolina
Oct. 4	at Georgia
Oct. 18	Texas
Oct. 25	Tennessee
Nov. 1	at Auburn
Nov. 8	Florida
Nov. 15	Tennessee Tech
Nov. 22	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 29	at Louisville

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Mikkel Skinner, TE	★★★★
2.	Darrin Strey, OT	★★★★
3.	Javeon Campbell, DL	★★★★
4.	Cedric Works Jr., EDGE	★★★★
5.	Demarcus Gardner, CB	★★★★
6.	Andrew Purcell, CB	★★★
7.	Martels Carter Jr., S	★★★
8.	Cameron Miller, WR	★★★
9.	DJ Miller, WR	★★★
10.	Kalen Edwards, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mark Stoops • Record at School: 77-73 (12 years) • Career Record: 77-73 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bush Hamdan • Defensive Coordinator: Brad White • Location: Lexington, Ky. • Stadium: Kroger Field (61,000)

LSU TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 7 | SEC PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE LSU's top-ranked transfer portal class got the big headlines, but the return of fifth-year quarterback Garrett Nussmeier is what truly affirmed the Tigers' hopes for 2025. After throwing for 4,052 yards and 29 touchdowns, he's a Heisman Trophy front-runner, and his strong right arm establishes LSU as a College Football Playoff contender.

The Tigers return only Aaron Anderson (team-best 61 catches for 884 yards, five TDs) among its top-five receivers, so LSU went deep into the portal. Expect Kentucky transfer Barion Brown and Oklahoma transfer Nic Anderson to earn starting roles with Aaron Anderson. Sophomore Trey'Dez Green is a rising star, but another OU transfer, Bauer Sharp, will allow LSU to utilize multiple-tight end packages.

The offensive line lost bookend tackles Will Campbell and Emery Jones Jr. to the NFL. Tyree Adams takes over at left tackle, while DJ Chester likely slides over from center to left guard to make room for Virginia Tech transfer Braelin Moore. LSU's rushing attack averaged just 116.4 yards per game in 2024, and the Tigers hope freshman Harlem Berry, the nation's top-rated high school running back, can emerge quickly.

DEFENSE Harold Perkins Jr. was a surprise returnee after an injury-marred 2024. He will play at Star, LSU's hybrid linebacker/safety position. Another key returnee from injury is Jacobian Guillory, who will anchor the middle of the Tigers' 4-3 front.

LSU needed edge rushers and landed Jack Pyburn from Florida and Patrick Payton from Florida State. Linebacker Whit Weeks, by far LSU's top tackler in 2024 with 125, is expected to be ready for the opener at Clemson after breaking an ankle in the Texas Bowl.

The Tigers have fresh faces at cornerback, with Virginia Tech transfer Mansoor Delane and freshman DJ Pickett, a 6-foot-4, 5-star prospect.

SPECIALISTS Damian Ramos has been a serviceable college kicker, making 78% of his field goals and 98% of his PATs. Punting has been a liability, though; LSU was 15th in the SEC in net punting. The Tigers brought in Grant Chadwick, who averaged 43.4 yards per kick as a true freshman at Middle Tennessee in 2024. Brown (24.9 yards per return, one TD last season) gives LSU a threat on kickoffs it hasn't had in years.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Brian Kelly says this is the best roster he's had in his four seasons at LSU. The Tigers are all in for 2025, and that means making the College Football Playoff. Anything less will be considered a failure. The talent is there; it's a question of molding the Tigers' veterans, transfers and freshmen into a team.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 SEC)

Sept. 1	vs. USC #	L	20-27
Sept. 7	Nicholls	W	44-21
Sept. 14	at South Carolina	W	36-33
Sept. 21	UCLA	W	34-17
Sept. 28	South Alabama	W	42-10
Oct. 12	Ole Miss (ot)	W	29-26
Oct. 19	at Arkansas	W	34-10
Oct. 26	at Texas A&M	L	23-38
Nov. 9	Alabama	L	13-42
Nov. 16	at Florida	L	16-27
Nov. 23	Vanderbilt	W	24-17
Nov. 30	Oklahoma	W	37-17
Dec. 31	vs. Baylor %	W	44-31

#Las Vegas %Texas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Clemson
Sept. 6	Louisiana Tech
Sept. 13	Florida
Sept. 20	SE Louisiana
Sept. 27	at Ole Miss
Oct. 11	South Carolina
Oct. 18	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 25	Texas A&M
Nov. 8	at Alabama
Nov. 15	Arkansas
Nov. 22	WKU
Nov. 29	at Oklahoma

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	DJ Pickett, CB	★★★★★
2.	Harlem Berry, RB	★★★★★
3.	Carius Curne, IOL	★★★★★
4.	TaRon Francis, WR	★★★★
5.	Jaiden Braker, LB	★★★★
6.	Solomon Thomas, IOL	★★★★
7.	Aidan Anding, CB	★★★★
8.	JT Lindsey, RB	★★★★
9.	Damien Shanklin, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Jhase Thomas, S	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Kelly • Record at School: 29-11 (3 years)
Career Record: 308-107-2 (21 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Sloan
Defensive Coordinator: Blake Baker • Location: Baton Rouge, La.
Stadium: Tiger Stadium (102,321)

GARRETT NUSSMEIER

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Nuss [Garrett Nussmeier] is a legit talent, and they did a really good job finally getting serious in the portal to put weapons around him. They're going to take a significant step back on the offensive line, but they're better at the skill positions. ... The big talk here is the way they've restructured. This isn't an autonomous coaching culture anymore. [GM] Austin Thomas has a huge role building the roster, and it showed this offseason. The internal evaluation of LSU football will look more professional; they're going to build BK [Brian Kelly] the best roster possible to go out and win games. They have playoff expectations here, and it's a better depth chart than he's had in Baton Rouge. If they aren't in the CFP, I think there's some serious pressure here."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	1	**AARON ANDERSON (JR.)**	0	Zavion Thomas (Sr.)
WR	6	Barion Brown (Sr.)	3	Chris Hilton Jr. (Sr.)
WR	4	Nic Anderson (Jr.)	12	Kyle Parker (So.)
LT	71	Tyree Adams (So.)	75	Weston Davis (Fr.)
LG	79	**DJ CHESTER (SO.)**	67	Bo Bordelon (Jr.)
C	61	Braelin Moore (Jr.)	78	Coen Echols (Fr.)
RG	65	Paul Mubenga (So.)	78	Coen Echols (Fr.)
RT	56	Josh Thompson (Sr.)	73	Ethan Calloway (Fr.)
TE	14	Trey'Dez Green (So.)	10	Bauer Sharp (Sr.)
QB	13	**GARRETT NUSSMEIER (SR.)**	11	Michael Van Buren Jr. (So.)
RB	29	Caden Durham (So.)	22	Harlem Berry (Fr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DE	6	Patrick Payton (Sr.)	12	Jimari Butler (Sr.)
DT	90	Jacobian Guillory (Sr.)	96	Dominick McKinley (So.)
DT	93	Ahmad Breaux (So.)	95	Shone Washington (Jr.)
DE	44	Jack Pyburn (Sr.)	19	Gabriel Reliford (So.)
LB	40	**WHIT WEEKS (JR.)**	46	Tylen Singleton (Fr.)
LB	42	Davhon Keys (So.)		Jaiden Braker (Fr.)
STAR	7	**HAROLD PERKINS JR. (JR.)**	30	Charles Ross II (Fr.)
CB	4	Mansoor Delane (Sr.)	1	**ASHTON STAMPS (JR.)**
CB	3	DJ Pickett (Fr.)	8	Ja'Keem Jackson (So.)
S	2	**JARDIN GILBERT (SR.)**	25	Javien Toviano (Jr.)
S	0	Tamarcus Cooley (So.)	10	Dashawn Spears (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	34	Damian Ramos (Sr.)	KR 6	Barion Brown (Sr.)
P	90	Grant Chadwick (So.)	PR 0	Zavion Thomas (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KIM KLEMENT NEITZEL-IMAGN IMAGES

BLAKE SHAPEN

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"When [Blake] Shapen was healthy last season, the offense wasn't bad at all. He knows how to run that system. This was a thin roster to start with, and then they were hit hard in the portal. Their biggest weakness outside of the defense is receiver, but they've portaled some guys who will start on the line right away. I think they'll improve on offense this season. ... The defense is legitimately bad. This is the ultimate line-of-scrimmage league, and they were the worst defensive line we saw last season. I think every one of their starters will be portaled, and some of those guys are very good, but even if they take that next step in the offensive system, the defensive front and run game defense have to improve dramatically. You don't have that in this league and you're dead."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (7)		
WR	4	**JORDAN MOSLEY (SR.)**	7	Markus Allen (Sr.)
WR	11	Ayden Williams (Jr.)	18	Jaron Glover (Jr.)
WR	3	Anthony Evans III (Jr.)	0	Brenen Thompson (Sr.)
LT	51	**LUKE WORK (SO.)**	71	Saquon Miles (Jr.)
LG	75	**JACOBY JACKSON (SR.)**	58	TJ Lockhart (Fr.)
C	72	Canon Boone (Sr.)	50	Koby Keenum (So.)
RG	61	Trevor Mayberry (Sr.)	55	Jakheem Shumpert (Jr.)
RT	76	**ALBERT REESE IV (SR.)**	74	Jimothy Lewis Jr. (Fr.)
TE	81	**SEYDOU TRAORE (SR.)**	10	Cameron Ball (Jr.)
QB	2	**BLAKE SHAPEN (SR.)**	17	Luke Kromenhoek (So.)
RB	6	**DAVON BOOTH (SR.)**	20	Johnnie Daniels (Sr.)

		DEFENSE (5)		
DE	27	Red Hibbler (Sr.)	98	Ashun Shepphard (Sr.)
DT	91	Deonte Anderson (Sr.)	90	Kai McClendon (So.)
DT	23	Trevion Williams (So.)	43	Will Whitson (Sr.)
OLB	44	**BRANDEN JENNINGS (SR.)**	8	Malick Sylla (Sr.)
ILB	40	**NIC MITCHELL (SR.)**	16	Derion Gullette (So.)
ILB	7	Zakari Tillman (Jr.)	10	Jalen Smith (So.)
STAR	3	**BRYLAN LANIER (SR.)**	31	LaKendrick James (Jr.)
CB	1	Kelley Jones (So.)	15	Jayven Williams (Jr.)
CB	4	DeAgo Brumfield (Sr.)	26	Dwight Lewis III (Sr.)
S	21	**HUNTER WASHINGTON (SR.)**	9	Tony Mitchell (Jr.)
S	2	**ISAAC SMITH (JR.)**	13	Jahron Manning (Sr.)

		SPECIALISTS		
K	80	Kyle Ferrie (Jr.)	KR	6 Davon Booth (Sr.)
P	88	Ethan Pulliam (So.)	PR	3 Anthony Evans III (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 66 | SEC PREDICTION: 16 | 2024 RECORD: 2-10, 0-8 SEC

OFFENSE In Year 2 of the Jeff Lebby era, the pieces are in place for Mississippi State to take a step forward offensively.

Quarterback Blake Shapen returns after missing the final eight games of last season due to a shoulder injury. Prior to being sidelined, Shapen was fourth nationally and second in the SEC in Pro Football Focus' passing grade. His overall offensive grade was tied for fourth in the FBS and third in the SEC at the time. Shapen's return, coupled with a deep running back room headlined by the returning Davon Booth, gives the Bulldog offense potential. Booth had the fourth-most all-purpose yards in the conference last season (1,231).

State has many new but talented options at receiver, leaving the biggest question mark on the offensive line. If that group can hold its own, the Bulldogs could certainly find more success moving the football than they did a year ago.

DEFENSE State ranked last in the SEC and 125th in the country in total defense last season, allowing an average of 456.4 yards per game. The reasons for that were many, but among the primary issues were a lack of depth along the defensive front and an inability to create any type of pass rush. MSU had only 10 sacks all year; only one FBS school had fewer.

The Bulldogs have brought in several transfers they hope can ramp up the pressure and tighten the screws on opposing offenses, including end Red Hibbler from NC State and SEC All-Freshman linebacker Jalen Smith from Tennessee. Combine all the new names with returners like safety Isaac Smith, who led the SEC with 127 tackles last year, and if nothing else, MSU will have more pieces to work with on the defensive side than in 2024.

SPECIALISTS Junior placekicker Kyle Ferrie is back after giving State consistent production the past two seasons. Ferrie has connected on 26 of his 34 career field-goal attempts and 65 of his 66 PATs. Sophomore Ethan Pulliam is likely to handle the punting duties. Once a two-sport athlete at State, Pulliam has given up baseball to focus solely on football. Several players should factor into the return game, including the versatile Booth.

FINAL ANALYSIS Lebby's second roster at Mississippi State is certainly more talented, and the team, at least statistically, should be improved following last year's 2-10 season. The biggest problem is that it will likely take more than just marginal improvement to find success against a brutal schedule that features home games against four of last season's College Football Playoff teams plus archrival Ole Miss, as well as some incredibly tough road tilts, including contests at Texas A&M, Florida and Missouri.

2024 RESULTS (2-10, 0-8 SEC)			
Aug. 31	Eastern Kentucky	W	56-7
Sept. 7	at Arizona State	L	23-30
Sept. 14	Toledo	L	17-41
Sept. 21	Florida	L	28-45
Sept. 28	at Texas	L	13-35
Oct. 12	at Georgia	L	31-41
Oct. 19	Texas A&M	L	24-34
Oct. 26	Arkansas	L	25-58
Nov. 2	UMass	W	45-20
Nov. 9	at Tennessee	L	14-33
Nov. 23	Missouri	L	20-39
Nov. 29	at Ole Miss	L	14-26

2025 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 30	at Southern Miss
Sept. 6	Arizona State
Sept. 13	Alcorn State
Sept. 20	Northern Illinois
Sept. 27	Tennessee
Oct. 4	at Texas A&M
Oct. 18	at Florida
Oct. 25	Texas
Nov. 1	at Arkansas
Nov. 8	Georgia
Nov. 15	at Missouri
Nov. 29	Ole Miss

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Kamario Taylor, QB	★★★★
2. Tyler Lockhart, LB	★★★★
3. Kyle Johnson, CB	★★★★
4. Tyshun Willis, EDGE	★★★★
5. Breyden Turnage, OT	★★★★
6. Saquon Miles, OT	★★★
7. Geron Johnson, RB	★★★
8. Ferzell Shepard, ATH	★★★
9. Matthew Lefeau, IOL	★★★
10. Ja'Bryis Stewart, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Lebby • Record at School: 2-10 (1 year) • Career Record: 2-10 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Lebby
Defensive Coordinator: Coleman Hutzler • Location: Starkville, Miss. • Stadium: Davis Wade Stadium (60,311)

MISSOURI TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 32 | SEC PREDICTION: 12 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE When you have one of the more experienced and proven offenses in the country in a given season, as Missouri did in 2024, that probably means you're going to have an awfully unproven unit the next season. Head coach Eliah Drinkwitz used the transfer portal to keep experience levels at an acceptable level, bringing in receivers Kevin Coleman Jr. (932 receiving yards at Mississippi State in 2024) and Xavier Loyd (912 at FCS Illinois State), running back Ahmad Hardy (1,351 rushing yards at ULM) and potentially two new starting tackles in Keagen Trost (Wake Forest) and Johnny Williams IV (West Virginia).

Coleman, Loyd and returnees Marquis Johnson and Joshua Manning should form an exciting receiving corps, and Hardy's rugged, physical style should translate to SEC play. But the offensive line is relatively unproven outside of guard Cayden Green, and so much will depend on the winner of the battle to replace three-year starting quarterback Brady Cook. Penn State transfer Beau Pribula and former blue-chipper Sam Horn were reportedly neck-and-neck in spring practice. Offensive coordinator Kirby Moore should be able to avoid any major regression if he's getting what he needs from behind center.

DEFENSE Replacing coordinator Blake Baker with Corey Batoon went pretty well, as Mizzou ranked 17th nationally in total defense and 20th in scoring defense despite a lot of personnel turnover. Now the Tigers not only return seven starters but also brought in six FBS starters from elsewhere, including linebacker and Big 12 Defensive Freshman of the Year Josiah Trotter (West Virginia) and star safety Jalen Catalon (UNLV).

Trotter might be the only starter who isn't a junior or senior, and if the Tigers have enough depth up front, where Georgia transfer Damon Wilson II is among the newcomers Batoon will rely on to generate pressure, this should be another top-20 unit. Tackle Chris McClellan, linebacker Triston Newson and nickel Daylan Carnell are all among the league's best.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Blake Craig was mostly automatic on shorter distances and made seven field goals beyond 40 yards, and the combination of Coleman (punts) and Johnson (kickoffs) should give the Tigers one of the better return tandems in the SEC.

FINAL ANALYSIS Mizzou's schedule is again favorable: The Tigers avoid Georgia, Texas, LSU and Tennessee, while Alabama, Texas A&M and South Carolina all visit Faurot Field. If they get the requisite sturdy play from a new starting quarterback, the pieces should be in place for another strong season. But we can't bank on that until we see said QB in action.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 5-3 SEC)

Aug. 29	Murray State	W	51-0
Sept. 7	Buffalo	W	38-0
Sept. 14	Boston College	W	27-21
Sept. 21	Vanderbilt (ot)	W	30-27
Oct. 5	at Texas A&M	L	10-41
Oct. 12	at UMass	W	45-3
Oct. 19	Auburn	W	21-17
Oct. 26	at Alabama	L	0-34
Nov. 9	Oklahoma	W	30-23
Nov. 16	at South Carolina	L	30-34
Nov. 23	at Mississippi State	W	39-20
Nov. 30	Arkansas	W	28-21
Dec. 30	vs. Iowa #	W	27-24

#Music City Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Central Arkansas
Sept. 6	Kansas
Sept. 13	Louisiana
Sept. 20	South Carolina
Sept. 27	UMass
Oct. 11	Alabama
Oct. 18	at Auburn
Oct. 25	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 8	Texas A&M
Nov. 15	Mississippi State
Nov. 22	at Oklahoma
Nov. 29	at Arkansas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Javion Hilson, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Matt Zollers, QB	★★★★
3.	Daeden Hopkins, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Marquise Davis, RB	★★★★
5.	Shaun Terry II, WR	★★★★
6.	Brendon Haygood, RB	★★★★
7.	Dante McClellan, LB	★★★★
8.	DaMarion Fowlkes, WR	★★★★
9.	Jack Lange, IOL	★★★★
10.	Donovan Olugbode, WR	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eliah Drinkwitz • Record at School: 38-24 (5 years)
Career Record: 50-25 (6 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kirby Moore
Defensive Coordinator: Corey Batoon • Location: Columbia, Mo.
Stadium: Faurot Field (62,621)

DAYLAN CARNELL

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"One of the most underrated coaching staffs in the entire country. If they can flip the QB and rework the offensive line and win another 10 games, Eli [Drinkwitz] should be on everyone's short list. ... The ULM running back [Ahmad Hardy] could do really well in this system; he might have a breakout year. ... [Beau] Pribula is a big, raw talent that could really thrive in Eli's offense. He needs to become more of a confident passer and rely less on his feet. He's such a physical runner, you wonder how often he can do that in this league and stay healthy. ... This isn't an overly talented roster right now and might not win as many games, but the program's health and identity are strong. Eli really carved out a spot in the SEC and built a reliable winner."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR		Kevin Coleman Jr. (Sr.)		Xavier Loyd (Sr.)
WR	2	Marquis Johnson (Jr.)	4	James Madison II (Fr.)
WR	0	**JOSHUA MANNING (JR.)**		Donovan Olugbode (Fr.)
LT		Johnny Williams IV (So.)	76	Jayven Richardson (Jr.)
LG	70	**CAYDEN GREEN (JR.)**	66	Logan Reichert (So.)
C	55	**CONNOR TOLLISON (SR.)**		Dominick Giudice (Sr.)
RG	73	Tristan Wilson (Jr.)	77	Curtis Peagler (Jr.)
RT		Keagen Trost (Sr.)		Jaylen Early (Jr.)
TE	87	**BRETT NORFLEET (JR.)**		Vince Brown II (Sr.)
QB		Beau Pribula (Sr.)	21	Sam Horn (Jr.)
RB		Ahmad Hardy (So.)	20	Jamal Roberts (So.)
DEFENSE (7)				
DE		Damon Wilson II (Jr.)	19	Darris Smith (Jr.)
DT	7	**CHRIS MCCLELLAN (SR.)**	33	Marquis Gracial (Jr.)
DT	10	Sterling Webb (Sr.)	95	Jalen Marshall (Jr.)
DE	9	**ZION YOUNG (SR.)**		Nate Johnson (Jr.)
ILB		Josiah Trotter (So.)	29	Khalil Jacobs (Sr.)
ILB	14	**TRISTON NEWSON (SR.)**	20	Nicholas Rodriguez (So.)
NB/OLB	13	**DAYLAN CARNELL (SR.)**	21	Trajen Greco (So.)
CB	12	**DREYDEN NORWOOD (SR.)**	24	**NICHOLAS DELOACH JR. (SO.)**
CB	2	Toriano Pride Jr. (Sr.)		Stephen Hall (Sr.)
S		Jalen Catalon (Sr.)		Santana Banner (So.)
S	1	**MARVIN BURKS JR. (JR.)**		Mose Phillips III (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	19	Blake Craig (So.)	KR 2	Marquis Johnson (Jr.)
P		Connor Weselman (Sr.)	PR	Kevin Coleman Jr. (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ERIC CANHA-IMAGN IMAGES

DEION BURKS

SCOUTING THE SOONERS

"It's a hot-seat situation for sure. They're banking on an instant impact from [Ben] Arbuckle and [John] Mateer the way Vanderbilt brought in the New Mexico State coach/QB combo. That could happen. Their receivers were nonexistent last year, but a lot of that was injury. They should bounce back and give Mateer some options. ... Normally, it's not a great idea when a head coach goes back to play-calling, but hey, [Brent] Venables was one of the best in the nation at it when he was at Clemson. He wants to have more control over what he knows. ... It's a huge gamble that Mateer can come in and immediately acclimate to playing against the defenses in this league. We'll see if he can do it because that's what will determine this staff's future."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	11	Javonnie Gibson (Jr.)	7	Zion Kearney (So.)
WR	9	Keontez Lewis (Sr.)	82	Ivan Carreon (So.)
WR	**4**	**DEION BURKS (SR.)**	5	Isaiah Sategna (Jr.)
LT	71	Logan Howland (So.)	56	Michael Fasusi (Fr.)
LG	**77**	**HEATH OZAETA (SO.)**	75	Daniel Akinkunmi (Fr.)
C	**52**	**TROY EVERETT (SR.)**		Jake Maikkula (Jr.)
RG	**54**	**FEBECHI NWAIWU (SR.)**	55	Eddy Pierre-Louis (So.)
RT	66	Derek Simmons (Sr.)	**76**	**JACOB SEXTON (SR.)**
TE	86	Carson Kent (Jr.)	18	Kaden Helms (Jr.)
QB	10	John Mateer (Jr.)	3	Michael Hawkins Jr. (So.)
RB		Jaydn Ott (Sr.)	2	Jovantae Barnes (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	8	Marvin Jones Jr. (Sr.)	44	Taylor Wein (So.)
NT	**52**	**DAMONIC WILLIAMS (SR.)**	0	David Stone (So.)
DT	**65**	**JAYDEN JACKSON (SO.)**	56	Gracen Halton (Sr.)
DE	**32**	**R MASON THOMAS (SR.)**	34	Adepoju Adebawore (Jr.)
LB	**10**	**KIP LEWIS (JR.)**	7	Sammy Omosigho (Jr.)
LB	11	Kobie McKinzie (Jr.)	17	Taylor Heim (So.)
LB	15	Kendel Dolby (Sr.)	5	Kendal Daniels (Sr.)
CB	**23**	**ELI BOWEN (SO.)**	12	Devon Jordan (So.)
CB	9	Gentry Williams (Jr.)	19	Jacobe Johnson (Jr.)
S	22	Peyton Bowen (Jr.)	1	Jaydan Hardy (So.)
S	**3**	**ROBERT SPEARS-JENNINGS (SR.)**	25	Michael Boganowski (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Tate Sandell (Jr.)	KR	5 Isaiah Sategna (Jr.)
P	87	Jacob Ulrich (So.)	PR	5 Isaiah Sategna (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KEVIN JAIRAJ-USA TODAY SPORTS

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 20 | SEC PREDICTION: 9 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 2-6 SEC

OFFENSE The Sooners, known for dynamic offense, were almost unrecognizable during their debut season in the SEC. Couldn't run. Couldn't pass. Couldn't block. The numbers reflected the struggles: 97th nationally in points per game, 93rd in third-down conversion rate, 113th in total offense and 119th in passing yards per game.

The transfer portal delivered a jolt of hope, with Washington State transfer quarterback John Mateer arriving after passing for 261.6 yards per game and ranking No. 1 with 44 total touchdowns accounted for. The late-spring addition of transfer running back Jaydn Ott offered a jolt as well. Ott produced 3,460 all-purpose yards over three seasons with Cal.

Oklahoma tried to bolster the offensive line with transfer help. But the unit has a steep climb to competitiveness after getting dominated by SEC defenses and allowing 50 sacks, tied for the most in the FBS.

The receiving corps needs playmakers to emerge. A healthy season for Deion Burks would be a boost. Make no mistake, however — all hope rests with Mateer.

DEFENSE This unit has suffered key losses through graduation and the portal, but it does return enough pieces to be formidable while the offense develops. Defensive end R Mason Thomas is a force on the edge, totaling nine sacks, 12.5 tackles for a loss and 11 quarterback hurries last season on his way to second-team All-SEC recognition. Corner Eli Bowen earned Freshman All-American honors, and senior safety Robert Spears-Jennings is a physical presence. The addition of Oklahoma State transfer Kendal Daniels to the "Cheetah" role should also help.

Promising tackle David Stone, a former 5-star recruit who surprisingly entered the portal in the spring, decided to return to Oklahoma, providing a boost to the front.

SPECIALISTS The Sooners hope they have solved their placekicking vacancy with UTSA transfer Tate Sandell, who was 19-of-23 on field goals last season, with a long of 54. Fellow transfer Jacob Ulrich takes over the punting. The return game needs playmakers to emerge.

FINAL ANALYSIS Venables could be at a crossroads, with a 22-17 overall record in three seasons and a 2-6 debut in the SEC, where his squad finished tied for 13th in the standings.

Oklahoma hosts Michigan in Week 2, to go with the rugged week-to-week SEC schedule. It's difficult to envision the Sooners making great gains in a league loaded with preseason Top 25 types. And that raises the question: When will Oklahoma start to resemble Oklahoma again?

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 2-6 SEC)

Aug. 30	Temple	W	51-3
Sept. 7	Houston	W	16-12
Sept. 14	Tulane	W	34-19
Sept. 21	Tennessee	L	15-25
Sept. 28	at Auburn	W	27-21
Oct. 12	vs. Texas #	L	3-34
Oct. 19	South Carolina	L	9-35
Oct. 26	at Ole Miss	L	14-26
Nov. 2	Maine	W	59-14
Nov. 9	at Missouri	L	23-30
Nov. 23	Alabama	W	24-3
Nov. 30	at LSU	L	17-37
Dec. 27	vs. Navy %	L	20-21

#Dallas %Armed Forces Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Illinois State
Sept. 6	Michigan
Sept. 13	at Temple
Sept. 20	Auburn
Oct. 4	Kent State
Oct. 11	vs. Texas #
Oct. 18	at South Carolina
Oct. 25	Ole Miss
Nov. 1	at Tennessee
Nov. 15	at Alabama
Nov. 22	Missouri
Nov. 29	LSU

#Dallas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Michael Fasusi, OT	★★★★★
2.	Ryan Fodje, OT	★★★★
3.	Elijah Thomas, WR	★★★★
4.	Manny Choice, WR	★★★★
5.	Trystan Haynes, CB	★★★★
6.	Marcus Wimberly, S	★★★★
7.	Trent Wilson, DL	★★★★
8.	Trynae Washington, TE	★★★★
9.	Tory Blaylock, RB	★★★★
10.	CJ Nickson, EDGE	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Venables • Record at School: 22-17 (3 years)
Career Record: 22-17 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Ben Arbuckle
Defensive Coordinator: Brent Venables • Location: Norman, Okla.
Stadium: Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium (80,126)

OLE MISS REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 18 | SEC PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE For the first time in three years, Jaxson Dart won't be lining up for Ole Miss under center. Dart, the program's all-time leader in passing yards and total offense, is off to the NFL. Redshirt sophomore Austin Simmons is next in line and has shown flashes of talent in limited opportunities. The lefty from Florida was thrust into action against Georgia last season and calmly led a scoring drive in the eventual upset win.

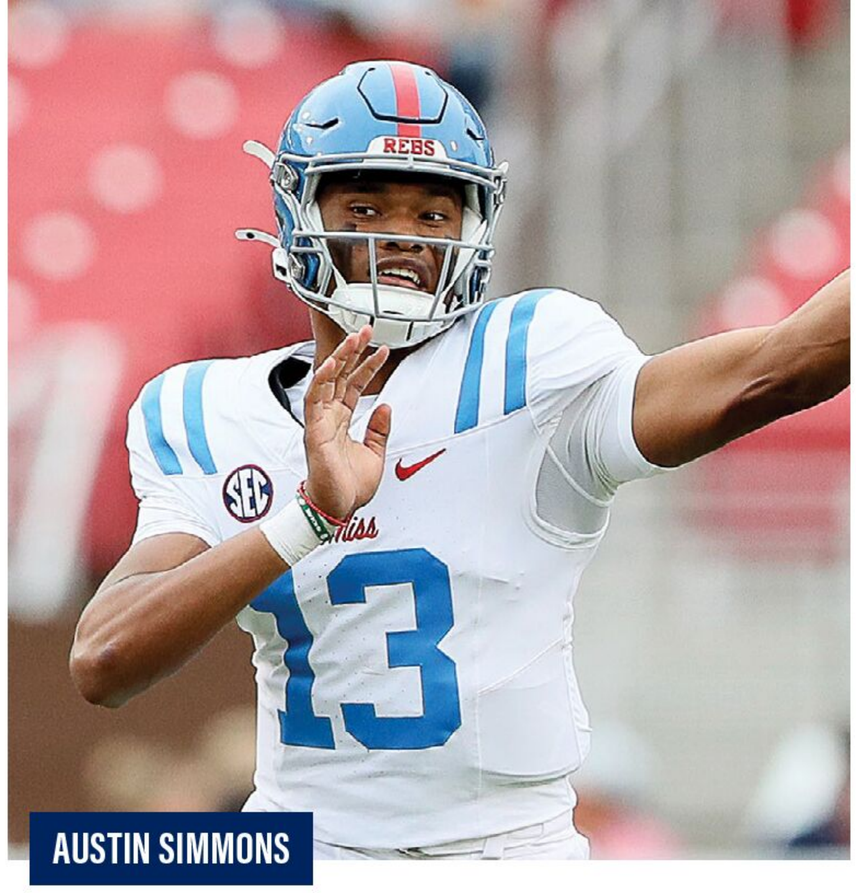
Simmons will be throwing to a largely new receiving corps, though head coach Lane Kiffin has once again assembled a formidable group through the transfer portal. Former Penn State receiver Harrison Wallace III and former Oklahoma State receiver De'Zhaun Stribling figure to be major factors, as does the always-reliable Cayden Lee, who had 874 receiving yards for the Rebels as a sophomore. The offensive line is also undergoing a makeover with four new starters.

DEFENSE Ole Miss had the No. 2 scoring defense in college football last season, and a big reason for that was arguably the best defensive line in the nation. Walter Nolen, JJ Pegues, Princely Umanmielen, Jared Ivey and Suntarine Perkins helped the Rebels set a school record with 52 sacks and lead the nation with 120 tackles for a loss. All but Perkins and his 10.5 sacks are gone, though the cupboard is hardly bare. Sophomores Kam Franklin and Will Echoles were highly touted prospects in Ole Miss' 2024 recruiting class, and redshirt sophomore Jamarious Brown was a Freshman All-American last year. The Rebels also sought help in the portal and picked up edge rushers Princewill Umanmielen and Da'Shawn Womack from Nebraska and LSU, respectively.

Lockdown corner Trey Amos is gone, as are cornerbacks Isaiah Hamilton and Brandon Turnage and safeties Trey Washington and John Saunders Jr.

SPECIALISTS Former WKU kicker Lucas Carneiro was a Lou Groza Award semifinalist last year, hitting 18-of-19 field-goal attempts for the Hilltoppers. He will take over for Caden Davis, whose 1.85 field goals per game tied for fourth nationally. The Rebels will also be breaking in a new punter, as three-year starter Fraser Masin — who averaged a career-best 46.6 yards per punt last year — is gone.

FINAL ANALYSIS Ole Miss is coming off its third 10-win season in four years, but 14 starters from the Rebels' Gator Bowl win are gone. The 2025 Rebels don't lack talent, but this season will largely hinge on how well the new pieces replace the outgoing ones, particularly Simmons at quarterback. The schedule is manageable by SEC standards, though, and Kiffin has the program in as consistent a place as its been at in decades.



AUSTIN SIMMONS

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"The first program in the league that went all-in on portal players to take them to a playoff bid went bust. Now what? [Austin] Simmons is talented but unpolished, and it's going to take some time to develop him. ... They're one of the best programs in the country at evaluating the portal, and they've done a very good job integrating that talent and winning right away, but this is still an inconsistent program. The loss at Florida last year is an example of why [Lane] Kiffin isn't considered an elite coach. ... They could be just as talented on defense and maybe bring Simmons along quickly, but they're still a step removed from the top-end programs. With the level of competition in this league, it's hard to see a roster like this one immediately come in and secure a playoff bid."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	19	**CAYDEN LEE (JR.)**	4	Caleb Odom (So.)
WR	1	De'Zhaun Stribling (Sr.)	7	Traylon Ray (Jr.)
WR	2	Harrison Wallace III (Sr.)	11	Deuce Alexander (So.)
LT	61	**DIEGO POUNDS (SR.)**		Terez Davis (So.)
LG	71	PJ Wilkins (So.)	76	John Wayne Oliver (Fr.)
C	62	Brycen Sanders (So.)	75	Patrick Kutas (Sr.)
RG	75	Patrick Kutas (Jr.)	72	Ethan Fields So.)
RT	50	Jayden Williams (Sr.)	73	Percy Lewis (Sr.)
TE	8	Dae'Quan Wright (Sr.)	9	Luke Hasz (Jr.)
QB	13	Austin Simmons (So.)	15	AJ Maddox (Fr.)
RB	22	Logan Diggs (Sr.)	5	Kewan Lacy (So.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	16	Princewill Umanmielen (Jr.)	5	Kam Franklin (So.)
DT	96	Jamarious Brown (So.)	52	Will Echoles (So.)
DT	51	Zxavian Harris (Sr.)	90	Jeffery Rush (Fr.)
DE	15	Da'Shawn Womack (Jr.)	35	Cam Clark (Fr.)
LB	4	**SUNTARINE PERKINS (JR.)**	30	Jaden Yates (Jr.)
LB	6	**TJ DOTTERY (JR.)**	12	Andrew Jones (Sr.)
LB	34	Tyler Banks (Sr.)	23	Jarcoby Hopson (Fr.)
CB	11	Jaylon Braxton (So.)	19	TJ Banks (So.)
CB	32	Chris Graves Jr. (Jr.)	13	Cedrick Beavers (Jr.)
S	14	Kapena Gushiken (Sr.)	29	Nick Cull (Jr.)
S	3	Sage Ryan (Sr.)	42	Andy Jaffe (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	17	Lucas Carneiro (Jr.)	KR	22 Logan Diggs (Sr.)
P	44	Oscar Bird (Fr.)	PR	22 Logan Diggs (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 5-3 SEC)

Aug. 31	Furman	W	76-0
Sept. 7	Middle Tennessee	W	52-3
Sept. 14	at Wake Forest	W	40-6
Sept. 21	Georgia Southern	W	52-13
Sept. 28	Kentucky	L	17-20
Oct. 5	at South Carolina	W	27-3
Oct. 12	at LSU (ot)	L	26-29
Oct. 26	Oklahoma	W	26-14
Nov. 2	at Arkansas	W	63-31
Nov. 9	Georgia	W	28-10
Nov. 23	at Florida	L	17-24
Nov. 29	Mississippi State	W	26-14
Jan. 2	vs. Duke #	W	52-20

#Gator Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Georgia State
Sept. 6	at Kentucky
Sept. 13	Arkansas
Sept. 20	Tulane
Sept. 27	LSU
Oct. 11	Washington State
Oct. 18	at Georgia
Oct. 25	at Oklahoma
Nov. 1	South Carolina
Nov. 8	The Citadel
Nov. 15	Florida
Nov. 29	at Mississippi State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

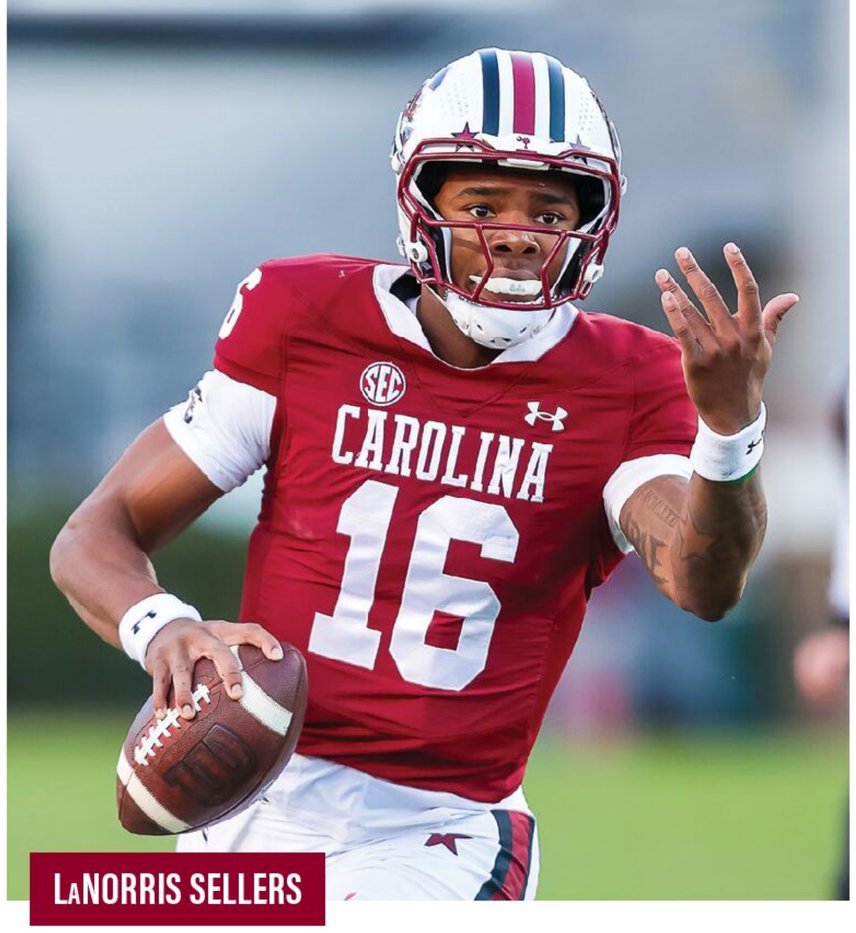
1.	Caleb Cunningham, WR	★★★★
2.	Devin Harper, IOL	★★★★
3.	Maison Dunn, CB	★★★★
4.	Andrew Maddox, DL	★★★★
5.	Shekai Mills-Knight, RB	★★★★
6.	Ladarian Clardy, S	★★★★
7.	Jarcoby Hopson, LB	★★★★
8.	Connor Howes, OT	★★★★
9.	Keon Young, S	★★★★
10.	Cortez Thomas, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lane Kiffin • Record at School: 44-18 (5 years) • Career Record: 105-52 (12+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Lane Kiffin, Joe Cox Defensive Coordinators: Pete Golding, Bryan Brown • Location: Oxford, Miss. Stadium: Vaught-Hemingway Stadium (64,038)

NELSON CHENAULT-IMAGN IMAGES



LaNORRIS SELLERS

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"The expectations are going to be sky-high for these guys. If they can continue to get that level of production from their defensive front and run the ball effectively, that's still the best, most reliable way to win games in this league. [LaNorris] Sellers is a playmaker, but they really need to find a guy to replace Rocket [Sanders]. ... They're going to be loaded this year because they've brought in portal players to compliment the defense. I think the mentality here is that they know they've got one season to break through with Sellers before he's gone, and they're going to build the best roster they can in the short term. It's playoff or bust for these guys because they're going to lose their best pieces at the end of the season."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	**8**	**NYCK HARBOR (JR.)**	19	Vandrevius Jacobs (So.)
WR	14	Jared Brown (Sr.)	9	Luke Doty (Sr.)
WR	3	Mazeo Bennett Jr. (So.)	18	Brian Rowe Jr. (Fr.)
LT	**74**	**JOSIAH THOMPSON (SO.)**	55	Jakai Moore (Sr.)
LG	51	Tree Babalade (So.)	58	Markee Anderson (So.)
C	50	Boaz Stanley (Jr.)	65	Rodney Newsom Jr. (Sr.)
RG	78	Trovon Baugh (Jr.)	52	Nick Sharpe (Sr.)
RT	**75**	**CASON HENRY (JR.)**	77	Jatavius Shivers (So.)
TE	**4**	**MICHAEL SMITH (SO.)**	5	Jordan Dingle (Sr.)
QB	**16**	**LANORRIS SELLERS (SO.)**	11	Air Noland (Fr.)
RB	1	Rahsul Faison (Sr.)	27	Oscar Adaway III (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	46	Bryan Thomas (Sr.)	9	Desmond Umeozulu (Jr.)
DT	44	Monkell Goodwine (Sr.)	93	Nick Barrett (Sr.)
DT	99	Gabriel Brownlow-Dindy (Jr.)	94	Zavion Hardy (Jr.)
DE	**6**	**DYLAN STEWART (SO.)**	11	Jaylen Brown (So.)
LB	0	Fred "JayR" Johnson (So.)	14	Jaron Willis (Jr.)
LB	17	Justin Okoronkwo (So.)	7	Shawn Murphy (Jr.)
CB	4	Vicari Swain (So.)	15	Brandon Cisse (Jr.)
CB	**20**	**JUDGE COLLIER (JR.)**	3	Myles Norwood (Sr.)
NB	**24**	**JALON KILGORE (JR.)**	25	Zahbari Sandy (So.)
S	**1**	**DQ SMITH (SR.)**	13	David Bucey (So.)
S	31	Peyton Williams (Jr.)	21	Kelvin Hunter (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	45	William Joyce (Sr.)	**KR**	8 Nyck Harbor (Jr.)
P	24	Mason Love (Fr.)	**PR**	24 Jalon Kilgore (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JEFF BLAKE-IMAGN IMAGES

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 12 | SEC PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE They say if you have a quarterback, you have a chance. South Carolina has a quarterback. LaNorris Sellers could be the best overall field general in the SEC this season. He overcame an early problem with turnovers last season to finish with 2,534 passing yards while completing nearly 66% of his attempts, with 18 touchdowns and seven picks. He also rushed for 674 yards and scored seven touchdowns on the ground.

The Gamecocks finally had a sustained ground attack behind Raheim "Rocket" Sanders and Sellers; the duo pushed South Carolina to 184.4 rushing yards per game, fourth in the conference. But Sanders and his 881 yards are gone. Utah State transfer Rahsul Faison and returnee Oscar Adaway III will shoulder much of the load this year.

The Gamecocks have a multitude of young receivers, which they'll need to replace tight end Josh Simon. He led the team in catches, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns last year.

DEFENSE A vicious unit that finished fourth in the SEC in total defense, third in sacks and tied for fourth in interceptions lost many of its most vital contributors. Nagurski Trophy winner Kyle Kennard is gone, along with safety Nick Emmanwori, both starting linebackers and three of the four starters on the defensive front.

Dylan Stewart (10.5 tackles for loss, 6.5 sacks) will be back to helm one side of the line after a Freshman All-America season, while nickel Jalon Kilgore (five interceptions) leads the secondary. Particular attention will go to the young linebackers, who are taking over for a trio who combined for 212 total tackles last year.

SPECIALISTS Head coach Shane Beamer, a special teams maestro, is replacing starters at kicker, punter, holder and long-snapper. Mason Love is a huge talent at punter and holder, but the rest — including his kicker — may not be decided until just before the opener.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Gamecocks won six straight last season to surge to 9-3 before losing the Citrus Bowl. With a lot of momentum after narrowly missing a playoff bid, they're a sexy pick to make the field this year.

They do return Sellers, but they lost so much defensively and on special teams that the offense will have to carry USC until the rest of the team find its footing. And on offense, an unknown running back and several unknown pass-catchers are going to have to become known quickly.

If the Gamecocks are solid from the opening kickoff of the season, there's no reason why they can't get through the first two months at 6-2 or better before they hit the home stretch.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 SEC)

Aug. 31	Old Dominion	W	23-19
Sept. 7	at Kentucky	W	31-6
Sept. 14	LSU	L	33-36
Sept. 21	Akron	W	50-7
Oct. 5	Ole Miss	L	3-27
Oct. 12	at Alabama	L	25-27
Oct. 19	at Oklahoma	W	35-9
Nov. 2	Texas A&M	W	44-20
Nov. 9	at Vanderbilt	W	28-7
Nov. 16	Missouri	W	34-30
Nov. 23	Wofford	W	56-12
Nov. 30	at Clemson	W	17-14
Dec. 31	vs. Illinois #	L	17-21

#Citrus Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	vs. Virginia Tech #
Sept. 6	South Carolina St.
Sept. 13	Vanderbilt
Sept. 20	at Missouri
Sept. 27	Kentucky
Oct. 11	at LSU
Oct. 18	Oklahoma
Oct. 25	Alabama
Nov. 1	at Ole Miss
Nov. 15	at Texas A&M
Nov. 22	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 29	Clemson

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Donovan Darden, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Malik Clark, WR	★★★★
3.	Jaquavious Dodd, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Jaquel Holman, ATH	★★★★
5.	Brian Rowe Jr., WR	★★★★
6.	Shedrick Sarratt Jr., IOL	★★★★
7.	Zavion Hardy, DL	★★★★
8.	Kendall Daniels Jr., S	★★★★
9.	Damola Ajidahun, OT	★★★★
10.	Donovan Murph, WR	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Shane Beamer • Record at School: 29-22 (4 years)
Career Record: 29-22 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Shula
Defensive Coordinator: Clayton White • Location: Columbia, S.C.
Stadium: Williams-Bruce Stadium (77,559)

TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 21 | SEC PREDICTION: 10 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE Tennessee is still chasing the offensive greatness it found in 2022 under head coach Josh Heupel. Getting back to that level is a tall order, as the Volunteers are replacing nearly all their production.

Joey Aguilar is in at quarterback. The Appalachian State transfer spent the spring at UCLA, then basically swapped placed with Nico Iamaleava after Heupel dropped the ex-Vols QB amid NIL negotiations. Aguilar passed for 6,760 yards and 56 touchdowns in two seasons at App State.

The Vols must replace Dylan Sampson, the 2024 SEC Offensive Player of the Year. Peyton Lewis (339 yards, three TDs last season) and DeSean Bishop (455, three) are the top candidates.

Left tackle Lance Heard is the lone returning starter on the offensive line. The Vols will count on 5-star freshman David Sanders Jr. to compete for a starting role. Transfers Wendell Moe Jr. (Arizona) and Sam Pendleton (Notre Dame) provide experience.

Mike Matthews (seven receptions, two TDs last season) has to be a sophomore standout for Tennessee in a thin and young wide receiver room. Chris Brazzell II (29 rec., 333 yds., two TDs) is a deep threat. Watch for Boo Carter, the projected starter at STAR, to make a splash on offense.

DEFENSE Heupel invoked the names of Tennessee defensive greats last season. That's because the Vols fielded one of their best defenses in decades.

Joshua Josephs is the centerpiece of the defensive front, as the Vols are coming off a second straight season with at least 100 tackles for a loss. He should be extremely productive alongside interior linemen Bryson Eason and Jaxson Moi. The Vols have shutdown cornerbacks in Rickey Gibson III and Jermod McCoy, although McCoy is coming off an ACL injury.

Carter, who will play in all three phases, could be a superstar. He is dynamic and broke into the lineup as a true freshman in 2024.

Tennessee needs good safety play following the departure of Will Brooks. It also needs a jump from juniors Arion Carter and Jeremiah Telander at linebacker. Carter is the Vols' leading returning tackler (68).

SPECIALISTS Max Gilbert returns as the starting kicker after a good first season. Punter Jackson Ross, who boots with either foot, is a third-year starter. Carter looks like a lethal returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Tennessee reached the College Football Playoff behind Sampson and its defense in 2024. It'll likely need a similar path to success in 2025, but the ceiling appears lower. The offense has a lot of question marks, which makes it hard to safely predict another 10-win season. The focus will be on how quickly Aguilar takes over and masters the offense.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 31	Chattanooga	W	69-3
Sept. 7	vs. NC State #	W	51-10
Sept. 14	Kent State	W	71-0
Sept. 21	at Oklahoma	W	25-15
Oct. 5	at Arkansas	L	14-19
Oct. 12	Florida (ot)	W	23-17
Oct. 19	Alabama	W	24-17
Nov. 2	Kentucky	W	28-18
Nov. 9	Mississippi State	W	33-14
Nov. 16	at Georgia	L	17-31
Nov. 23	UTEP	W	56-0
Nov. 30	at Vanderbilt	W	36-23
Dec. 21	at Ohio State %	L	17-42

#Charlotte, N.C. %CFB Playoff First Round

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	vs. Syracuse #
Sept. 6	East Tennessee St.
Sept. 13	Georgia
Sept. 20	UAB
Sept. 27	at Mississippi State
Oct. 11	Arkansas
Oct. 18	at Alabama
Oct. 25	at Kentucky
Nov. 1	Oklahoma
Nov. 15	New Mexico State
Nov. 22	at Florida
Nov. 29	Vanderbilt

#Atlanta

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. David Sanders Jr., OT ★★★★★
2. Isaiah Campbell, DL ★★★★★
3. Mariyon Dye, EDGE ★★★★
4. DaSaahn Brame, TE ★★★★
5. Travis Smith Jr., WR ★★★★
6. Christian Gass, LB ★★★★
7. Jaedon Harmon, LB ★★★★
8. Radarious Jackson, WR ★★★★
9. George MacIntyre, QB ★★★★
10. Nic Moore, IOL ★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Josh Heupel • Record at School: 37-15 (4 years)
Career Record: 65-23 (7 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Joey Halzle
Defensive Coordinator: Tim Banks • Location: Knoxville, Tenn.
Stadium: Neyland Stadium (101,915)

JERMOD McCOY

SCOUTING THE VOLUNTEERS

"Losing Nico [Iamaleava] isn't good. They're not replacing him with a more talented quarterback, and they're losing the QB who ran their system in a playoff game. But because of the way everything went down, I don't think anyone blames the program or Josh [Heupel], and with the turnover on defense, Nico leaving makes a transition year a lot easier to stomach. ... The offense won't fall off a cliff; that system is effective at adjusting for personnel, even the quarterback. The bigger question, even after Nico, is replacing the defensive starters who carried them in big games. The secondary is legit and probably their strength right now. ... They're going to take a step back and won't be a playoff team this season, but the quarterback play won't be awful."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	10	Mike Matthews (So.)	84	Radarious Jackson (Fr.)
WR	14	Braylon Staley (Fr.)	81	Amari Jefferson (Fr.)
WR	**17**	**CHRIS BRAZZELL II (JR.)**	80	Travis Smith Jr. (Fr.)
LT	**53**	**LANCE HEARD (JR.)**	68	Bennett Warren (Fr.)
LG	75	Wendell Moe Jr. (Jr.)	79	Shamurad Umarov (So.)
C	50	William Satterwhite (Fr.)	71	Max Anderson (Fr.)
RG	56	Sam Pendleton (So.)	72	Jesse Perry (Fr.)
RT	70	David Sanders Jr. (Fr.)	73	Brian Grant (Jr.)
TE	**87**	**MILES KITSELMAN (SR.)**	0	Ethan Davis (So.)
QB		Joey Aguilar (Sr.)	12	Jake Merklinger (Fr.)
RB	27	Peyton Lewis (So.)	18	DeSean Bishop (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	**90**	**DOMINIC BAILEY (SR.)**	42	Tyre West (Sr.)
DT	**20**	**BRYSON EASON (SR.)**	94	Nathan Robinson (So.)
DT	51	Jaxson Moi (Sr.)	53	Daevin Hobbs (Jr.)
EDGE	19	Joshua Josephs (Sr.)	31	Caleb Herring (Jr.)
MLB	**22**	**JEREMIAH TELANDER (JR.)**	13	Edwin Spillman (Fr.)
WLB	**7**	**ARION CARTER (JR.)**	54	Jordan Burns (Fr.)
CB	**3**	**JERMOD MCCOY (JR.)**	27	Ty Redmond (Fr.)
CB	**1**	**RICKEY GIBSON III (JR.)**	6	Jalen McMurray (Sr.)
STAR	23	Boo Carter (So.)	34	Dylan Lewis (Fr.)
S	**2**	**ANDRE TURRENTINE (SR.)**	25	Kaleb Beasley (So.)
S	15	Edrees Farooq (So.)	43	Jackson Matthews (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Max Gilbert (So.)	KR	31	Daune Morris (Fr.)
P	98	Jackson Ross (Jr.)	PR	23	Boo Carter (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

KEVIN JAIRAJ-IMAGN IMAGES

ARCH MANNING

SCOUTING THE LONGHORNS

"Right now, the belief is that Arch [Manning] will elevate the offense immediately, and you can expect a much more dynamic scheme from Sark [Steve Sarkisian]. This kid is a legit, Heisman-level package. Provided he produces at that level, the offense will be even better. They're stacked with talent. ... They could have one of the best defensive lines in the entire country. They have next-level pass rushers and the size and physicality to win against the run. ... This program is one of the most effectively run in terms of personnel, NIL and the new era of the sport. If Manning blows up and goes to the league next year, this is still the program to chase. They're professionalizing in a way other programs aren't."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	5	Ryan Wingo (So.)	11	Michael Terry III (Fr.)
WR	0	**DEANDRE MOORE JR. (JR.)**	2	Jaime Ffrench (Fr.)
WR		Emmett Mosley V (So.)	13	Parker Livingstone (Fr.)
LT	74	Trevor Goosby (So.)	71	Nick Brooks (Fr.)
LG	72	Neto Umeozulu (Jr.)	75	Jaydon Chatman (So.)
C	54	Cole Hutson (Sr.)	62	Connor Robertson (Jr.)
RG	52	**DJ CAMPBELL (SR.)**	70	Nate Kibble (Fr.)
RT	73	Brandon Baker (So.)	77	Andre Cojoe (So.)
TE		Jack Endries (Jr.)	83	Spencer Shannon (So.)
QB	16	Arch Manning (So.)	15	Trey Owens (Fr.)
RB	5	**QUINTREVION WISNER (JR.)**	4	CJ Baxter (So.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	91	Ethan Burke (Sr.)	92	Colton Vasek (So.)
DT	97	Alex January (So.)	93	Hero Kanu (Sr.)
DT	99	Cole Brevard (Sr.)	44	Travis Shaw (Sr.)
DE	11	Colin Simmons (So.)	19	Zina Umeozulu (Fr.)
MLB	0	**ANTHONY HILL JR. (JR.)**	14	Brad Spence (Jr.)
WLB	18	**LIONA LEFAU (JR.)**	8	**TREY MOORE (SR.)**
STAR	2	Derek Williams Jr. (So.)	27	Wardell Mack (Fr.)
CB	5	**MALIK MUHAMMAD (JR.)**	6	Kobe Black (So.)
CB	3	**JAYLON GUILBEAU (SR.)**	24	Warren Roberson (So.)
S	4	Jelani McDonald (Jr.)	9	Jonah Williams (Fr.)
S	16	**MICHAEL TAAFFE (SR.)**	21	Xavier Filsaime (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Mason Shipley (Sr.)	KR 21	Ryan Niblett (So.)
P	19	Jack Bouwmeester (Sr.)	PR 21	Ryan Niblett (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

MARK J. REBILAS-IMAGN IMAGESN IMAGES

TEXAS LONGHORNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 1 | SEC PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 13-3, 7-1 SEC

OFFENSE Arch Madness is sweeping Austin. After two seasons of backing up Quinn Ewers, Arch Manning is now running head coach Steve Sarkisian's offense as the Longhorns seek a third straight College Football Playoff berth. Manning, whose athleticism mirrors his grandfather, Archie, more than his Super Bowl-winning uncles, Peyton and Eli, will line up behind four new offensive line starters as well as returning right guard DJ Campbell. Most of the projected O-line starters have been working with Manning on the second-team offense in practice the past two years.

Texas has a talented running back room, led by junior Quintrevion Wisner, who ran for 1,064 yards (4.7 ypc) and five touchdowns while catching 44 passes for 311 yards and one TD in 2024.

Texas returns playmaking receivers DeAndre Moore Jr. and Ryan Wingo and added Stanford transfer Emmett Mosley V, who caught 48 passes for 525 yards and six TDs as a freshman in 2024.

The biggest hole to fill is at tight end, where Cal transfer Jack Endries (56 rec., 623 yds. in 2024) looks to replace record-setter Gunnar Helm.

DEFENSE The defense was the strength of the team in 2024 and could be again in 2025 if the Longhorns hit on portal additions at defensive tackle (Cole Brevard of Purdue, Travis Shaw of North Carolina and Hero Kanu of Ohio State) as well as a star-studded recruiting haul.

Texas is loaded at end, led by sophomore Colin Simmons (9.0 sacks in 2024). The Longhorns might have the best linebacker in the country in junior Anthony Hill Jr. (16.5 tackles for a loss, 8.0 sacks in 2024).

The secondary lost Thorpe Award winner Jahdae Barron but is still plenty talented, led by safeties Michael Taaffe and Jelani McDonald and outside corners Malik Muhammad and Jaylon Guilbeau.

SPECIALISTS Texas dipped into the portal for reinforcements, bringing in Utah punter Jack Bouwmeester (44.7 yards per punt in 2024) and UTSA placekicker Mason Shipley (31-of-35 on field goals for his career). Speedster Ryan Niblett is likely to be a return specialist.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Longhorns, who reeled in the nation's top recruiting class in 2025, have national title aspirations despite trying to replace 14 players who were invited to the NFL Scouting Combine. Reminiscent of his mentor Nick Saban, Sarkisian has added to his football staff, including former West Virginia head coach Neal Brown. Texas' season opener at defending national champion Ohio State on Aug. 30 is an opportunity for Manning and the Longhorns to serve notice to the rest of the nation.

2024 RESULTS (13-3, 7-1 SEC)

Aug. 31	Colorado State	W	52-0
Sept. 7	at Michigan	W	31-12
Sept. 14	UTSA	W	56-7
Sept. 21	ULM	W	51-3
Sept. 28	Mississippi State	W	35-13
Oct. 12	vs. Oklahoma #	W	34-3
Oct. 19	Georgia	L	15-30
Oct. 26	at Vanderbilt	W	27-24
Nov. 9	Florida	W	49-17
Nov. 16	at Arkansas	W	20-10
Nov. 23	Kentucky	W	31-14
Nov. 30	at Texas A&M	W	17-7
Dec. 7	vs. Georgia % (ot)	L	19-22
Dec. 21	Clemson &	W	38-24
Jan. 1	vs. Arizona State $ (ot)	W	39-31
Jan. 10	vs. Ohio State !	L	14-28

#Dallas %Atlanta &CFB Playoff First Round
$Peach Bowl: CFB Playoff Quarterfinal
!Cotton Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Ohio State
Sept. 6	San José State
Sept. 13	UTEP
Sept. 27	Sam Houston
Oct. 4	at Florida
Oct. 11	vs. Oklahoma #
Oct. 18	at Kentucky
Oct. 25	at Mississippi State
Nov. 1	Vanderbilt
Nov. 15	at Georgia
Nov. 22	Arkansas
Nov. 29	Texas A&M

#Dallas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Lance Jackson, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Jonah Williams, S	★★★★★
3.	Kade Phillips, CB	★★★★★
4.	Elijah Barnes, LB	★★★★★
5.	Kaliq Lockett, WR	★★★★
6.	Smith Orogbo, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Justus Terry, DL	★★★★
8.	Graceson Littleton, CB	★★★★
9.	Myron Charles, DL	★★★★
10.	Michael Terry III, ATH	★★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Steve Sarkisian • Record at School: 38-17 (4 years)
Career Record: 84-52 (10+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kyle Flood
Defensive Coordinator: Pete Kwiatkowski • Location: Austin, Texas
Stadium: Darrell K Royal–Texas Memorial Stadium (100,119)

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 19 | SEC PREDICTION: 8 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 SEC

OFFENSE Guess the highest-scoring SEC team in conference games last season: It was Texas A&M. That may be surprising, but the Aggies averaged 29.4 points in SEC play and exceeded 30 points in five of eight conference games. They could be even better in 2025. That will depend largely on sophomore quarterback Marcel Reed, who showed promise in passing for 1,864 yards and rushing for 543 last season.

Transfer receivers KC Concepcion (NC State) and Mario Craver (Mississippi State) add much-needed speed. The Aggies also welcome the return of All-SEC running back Le'Veon Moss, who rushed for 765 yards despite missing all or most of five games because of injury.

A&M's offensive line should be among the best in the conference, maybe even the nation. Tackle Trey Zuhn III has all-conference credentials. Guards Chase Bisontis and Ar'maj Reed-Adams should also contend for postseason accolades. Center Mark Nabou Jr. is back after missing almost all of last season because of a torn ACL.

DEFENSE After squandering a 17-point lead in a Las Vegas Bowl loss to USC, A&M head coach Mike Elko ranted about failed zone coverage, poor tackling and overall defensive futility. Once a premier defensive coordinator, Elko will resume calling that side of the ball. Still, a lot needs correcting, especially in the pass defense, which ranked 13th in the SEC.

All-SEC cornerback Will Lee III and nickelback Tyreek Chappell, also back from injury, are dependable. Transfers Jordan Shaw (Washington) and Julian Humphrey (Georgia) could upgrade coverage.

The pass rush is also a concern. Defensive end Cashius Howell had four sacks last season. Nobody else on the roster had more than 2.5.

Run defense is an issue, too. A&M allowed more runs of at least 20 yards (19) than any other team in the SEC. Linebackers Taurean York and Scooby Williams are solid, but improvement is needed.

SPECIALISTS Groza Award semifinalist Randy Bond converted 83.3% of his field-goal attempts (20-of-24) in 2024. He's made 59 field goals in his career and has hit from 55 yards. Punter Tyler White has a big leg but needs to be more consistent. Sophomore Terry Bussey has vast potential on kick returns. Kick coverage must improve.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Aggies typically are good but not great. They've averaged eight victories since joining the SEC in 2012. Last season, their first under Elko, they were 8-5. This year could be better if Reed continues to progress and personnel holes are adequately patched. But major defensive improvement is needed to break out of the eight-win rut.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 SEC)

Aug. 31	Notre Dame	L	13-23
Sept. 7	McNeese	W	52-10
Sept. 14	at Florida	W	33-20
Sept. 21	Bowling Green	W	26-20
Sept. 28	vs. Arkansas #	W	21-17
Oct. 5	Missouri	W	41-10
Oct. 19	at Mississippi State	W	34-24
Oct. 26	LSU	W	38-23
Nov. 2	at South Carolina	L	20-44
Nov. 16	New Mexico State	W	38-3
Nov. 23	at Auburn (ot)	L	41-43
Nov. 30	Texas	L	7-17
Dec. 27	vs. USC %	L	31-35

#Arlington, TX %Las Vegas Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	UTSA
Sept. 6	Utah State
Sept. 13	at Notre Dame
Sept. 27	Auburn
Oct. 4	Mississippi State
Oct. 11	Florida
Oct. 18	at Arkansas
Oct. 25	at LSU
Nov. 8	at Missouri
Nov. 15	South Carolina
Nov. 22	Samford
Nov. 29	at Texas

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jerome Myles, WR	★★★★
2.	Lamont Rogers, OT	★★★★
3.	Marco Jones, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Jamar Beal-Goines, CB	★★★★
5.	Adonyss Currie, CB	★★★★
6.	Nelson McGuire, IOL	★★★★
7.	Kiotti Armstrong, TE	★★★★
8.	Chace Sims, DL	★★★★
9.	DJ Sanders, DL	★★★★
10.	Rashad Johnson Jr., S	★★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Elko • Record at School: 8-5 (1 year) • Career Record: 24-14 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Collin Klein
Defensive Coordinator: Jay Bateman • Location: College Station, Texas • Stadium: Kyle Field (102,733)

TAUREAN YORK

MARIA LYSAKER-IMAGN IMAGES

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"They didn't finish strong, but the turnaround here was remarkable. As coaches, we talked about the culture at this place really falling to rock-bottom under Jimbo [Fisher]. You turn on the tape from [Mike] Elko, and those kids are playing harder, playing smarter. That's coaching, but it's culture. It's the want-to. ... They have a great run game, and the entire offensive line should be back. [Marcel] Reed's ceiling is still to be determined; he showed a lot of good and some bad last season. Elko is going to be more involved on the defense, I think. The need position in the offseason was defensive line, so watch for that. ... Elko understands A&M, and eventually this could be the most physical, aggressive team in the league."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	7	KC Concepcion (Jr.)	82	Jonah Wilson (So.)
WR	1	Mario Craver (So.)	0	Izaiah Williams (Fr.)
WR	2	Terry Bussey (So.)	3	Ashton Bethel-Roman (Fr.)
LT	60	**TREY ZUHN III (SR.)**	70	Robert Bourdon (Fr.)
LG	71	**CHASE BISONTIS (JR.)**	50	Isendre Ahfua (Fr.)
C	54	Mark Nabou Jr. (So.)	61	**KOLINU'U FAAIU (SR.)**
RG	55	**AR'MAJ REED-ADAMS (SR.)**	52	Blake Ivy (Fr.)
RT	78	**DAMETRIOUS CROWNOVER (SR.)**	76	Reuben Fatheree II (Sr.)
TE	87	Nate Boerkircher (Sr.)	17	Theo Melin Öhrström (Jr.)
QB	10	**MARCEL REED (SO.)**	16	Miles O'Neill (Fr.)
RB	8	**LE'VEON MOSS (SR.)**	4	Rueben Owens II (So.)

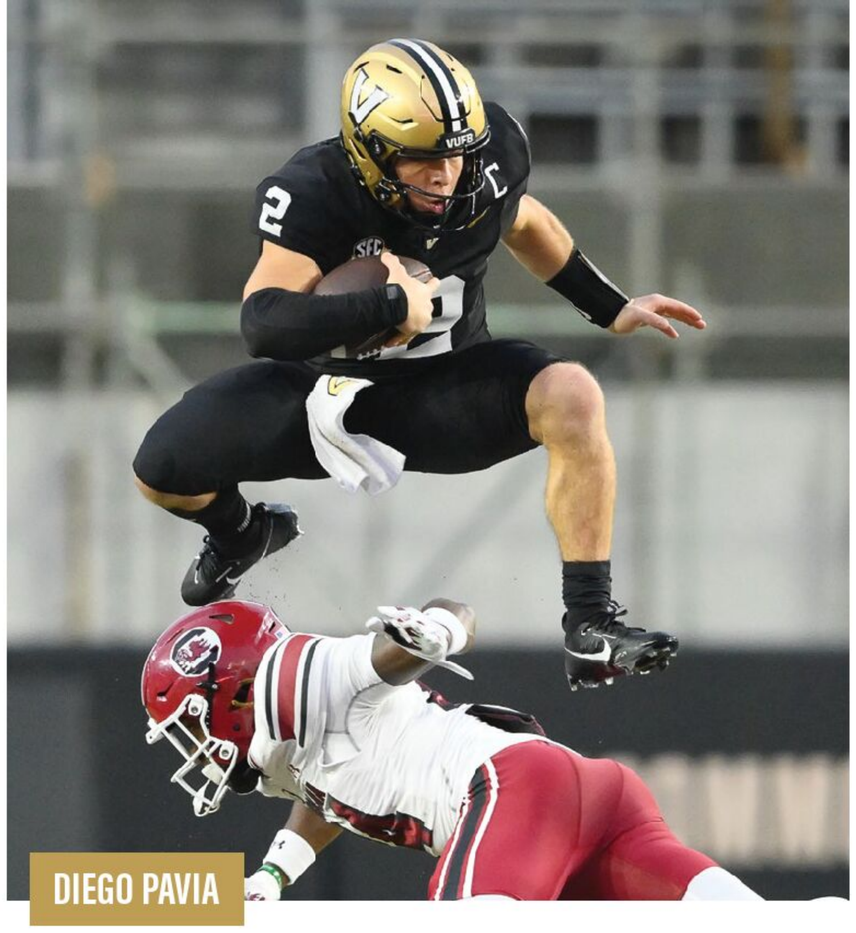
DEFENSE (8)

DE	9	Cashius Howell (Sr.)	18	T.J. Searcy (Jr.)
DT	17	**ALBERT REGIS (SR.)**	11	Tyler Onyedim (Sr.)
DT	5	DJ Hicks (Jr.)	55	Dealyn Evans (Fr.)
DE	15	Rylan Kennedy (Jr.)	30	Solomon Williams (Fr.)
LB	21	**TAUREAN YORK (JR.)**	32	Tristian Jernigan (So.)
LB	0	**SCOOBY WILLIAMS (SR.)**	27	Daymion Sanford (Jr.)
CB	4	**WILL LEE III (SR.)**	8	Jordan Shaw (So.)
CB	2	**DEZZ RICKS (SO.)**	6	Julian Humphrey (Jr.)
NB	7	**TYREEK CHAPPELL (SR.)**	19	Bravion Rogers (Jr.)
S	25	**DALTON BROOKS (JR.)**	3	**MARCUS RATCLIFFE (JR.)**
S	1	Bryce Anderson (Sr.)	33	Jarred Kerr (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Randy Bond (Sr.)	KR	2 Terry Bussey (So.)
P	37	Tyler White (So)	PR	2 Terry Bussey (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**



DIEGO PAVIA

SCOUTING THE COMMODORES

"This is why you invest in NIL over facilities. This is why you have to be serious about personnel. Vanderbilt's coaches didn't suddenly learn how to coach. Clark [Lea] is a fantastic, sharp defensive mind, and now he's got a roster capable of winning games in the league. ... [Diego] Pavia is an 'it factor' guy. He's not the most talented, but he's the definition of the college football playmaker. He's never out of it until the play is over, and the entire offense improves when he's clicking. I think you'll see more advanced concepts from them this season to mix up their standard option play. ... They're still lacking depth on both lines of scrimmage. That's probably the biggest weakness right now. ... With the attention on them, it will get a lot harder to win games."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)				
WR	0	**JUNIOR SHERRILL (JR.)**	25	Martel Hight (Jr.)
WR		Tre Richardson (Jr.)	5	Richie Hoskins (Sr.)
WR		Trent Hudson (Sr.)	17	Chance Fitzgerald (So.)
QT	66	Isaia Glass (Sr.)		Clinton Azubuike (So.)
QG		Sterling Porcher (Sr.)	52	Kevo Wesley (Sr.)
C	53	Jordan White (Sr.)	70	Cade McConnell (Jr.)
SG	50	**CHASE MITCHELL (SR.)**	56	Gunner Givens (Jr.)
ST	55	Bryce Henderson (Sr.)	62	CJ Williams (Fr.)
TE	9	**ELI STOWERS (SR.)**	16	**COLE SPENCE (JR.)**
QB	2	**DIEGO PAVIA (SR.)**	19	Blaze Berlowitz (So.)
RB	28	**SEDRICK ALEXANDER (JR.)**	22	Makhilyn Young (So.)
DEFENSE (7)				
DE	96	**KHORDAE SYDNOR (SR.)**	95	Linus Zunk (Jr.)
DT	53	Glenn Seabrooks III (So.)	55	Aaron Bryant (Jr.)
DT	5	**YILANAN OUATTARA (SR.)**		Jaylon Stone (So.)
RAZOR	29	**MILES CAPERS (JR.)**	9	Keanu Koht (Jr.)
ILB	10	**LANGSTON PATTERSON (SR.)**	22	**BRYAN LONGWELL (JR.)**
ILB	22	Bryce Cowan (Jr.)	24	Nick Rinaldi (Jr.)
STAR	2	**RANDON FONTENETTE (JR.)**	33	Vanzale Hinton (Fr.)
CB	25	**MARTEL HIGHT (JR.)**	17	Mark Davis Jr. (Sr.)
CB	11	Marlon Jones Jr. (Sr.)	27	Jaylin Lackey (So.)
S	8	CJ Heard (So.)	23	Carson Lawrence (Fr.)
S	7	Marlen Sewell (Sr.)	23	Dontae Carter (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	88	Brock Taylor (So.)	KR	Tre Richardson (Jr.)
P	38	Nick Haberer (Sr.)	PR 25	Martel Hight (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

STEVE ROBERTS-IMAGN IMAGES

VANDERBILT COMMODORES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 40 | SEC PREDICTION: 14 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Diego Pavia's legal victory over the NCAA could produce more on-field victories for Vanderbilt, as a federal judge ruled that the star quarterback's junior-college seasons don't count against his eligibility clock. Thus, Pavia will return in 2025.

To keep Pavia healthier and strengthen the run game, Vandy invested in offensive linemen through the transfer portal. Four new starters arrive, while the returner — Chase Mitchell — will move inside to guard. The front five looked improved this spring but projects as a bottom-tier SEC unit.

Vandy got a boost when tight end Eli Stowers opted to bypass the NFL Draft. Stowers remains the Commodores' top weapon, but the supporting cast is iffy. Wide receiver Junior Sherrill is solid, and the hope is that former New Mexico State wideout Trent Hudson — after a one-year detour at Mississippi State — can provide a legitimate target on the other side. Vandy will try cornerback Martel Hight as a part-time receiver.

Sedrick Alexander leads the tailbacks, who need more room to run than they got last year.

DEFENSE Head coach Clark Lea is taking a risk by surrendering his role as defensive coordinator and promoting Steve Gregory, a former NFL safeties coach who had not called plays prior to late last season. The scheme won't change much. Although the Commodores don't have star power, they feature a front seven that looks unusually deep and should hold up against the run. Vandy can cycle through at least nine proven linemen, led by end Khordae Sydnor. Linebackers Nick Rinaldi and Bryce Cowan will also step in as third-down options to try to boost a weak pass rush.

Randon Fontenette is the defense's best player in his hybrid role. Vandy has its deepest cornerback room in years, although safety is a question mark, with two veteran starters to replace.

SPECIALISTS SP+ ranked Vanderbilt's special teams as the nation's third-best in 2024, and that might continue. Brock Taylor is one of the SEC's top kickers after making 18-of-21 field goals last year; he has range to 60 yards. Nick Haberer transferred in from Washington State and has averaged 42.9 yards per punt over his career. Hight is an elite punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Recruiting momentum from one winning season isn't enough to dramatically transform Vanderbilt. But the Commodores have a lot going for them — a high-quality quarterback in Pavia, an All-SEC weapon for him in Stowers, a deep defense and potentially great special teams. A similar season to 2024, perhaps with one more win thanks to improved blocking and a stouter pass defense, seems logical.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SEC)

Aug. 31	Virginia Tech (ot)	W	34-27
Sept. 7	Alcorn State	W	55-0
Sept. 14	at Georgia State	L	32-36
Sept. 21	at Missouri (ot)	L	27-30
Oct. 5	Alabama	W	40-35
Oct. 12	at Kentucky	W	20-13
Oct. 19	Ball State	W	24-14
Oct. 26	Texas	L	24-27
Nov. 2	at Auburn	W	17-7
Nov. 9	South Carolina	L	7-28
Nov. 23	at LSU	L	17-24
Nov. 30	Tennessee	L	23-36
Dec. 27	vs. Georgia Tech #	W	35-27

#Birmingham Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Charleston Southern
Sept. 6	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 13	at South Carolina
Sept. 20	Georgia State
Sept. 27	Utah State
Oct. 4	at Alabama
Oct. 18	LSU
Oct. 25	Missouri
Nov. 1	at Texas
Nov. 8	Auburn
Nov. 22	Kentucky
Nov. 29	at Tennessee

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Austin Howard, LB	★★★★
2.	Davin Chandler, S	★★★★
3.	Carson Lawrence, S	★★★★
4.	Josiah Broxton, LB	★★★
5.	Vanzale Hinton, CB	★★★
6.	Jack Elliott, QB	★★★
7.	Cameran Dickson, WR	★★★
8.	Cayden Daniels, CB	★★★
9.	Kayleb Barnett, WR	★★★
10.	Lebron Hill, WR	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clark Lea • Record at School: 16-33 (4 years)
Career Record: 16-33 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Beck
Defensive Coordinator: Steve Gregory • Location: Nashville, Tenn.
Stadium: FirstBank Stadium (40,350)

SBC SUN BELT PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST

1. JAMES MADISON DUKES
2. GEORGIA SOUTHERN EAGLES
3. OLD DOMINION MONARCHS
4. COASTAL CAROLINA CHANTICLEERS
5. APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS
6. MARSHALL THUNDERING HERD
7. GEORGIA STATE PANTHERS

WEST

1. TEXAS STATE BOBCATS
2. LOUISIANA RAGIN' CAJUNS
3. SOUTH ALABAMA JAGUARS
4. ARKANSAS STATE RED WOLVES
5. SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES
6. TROY TROJANS
7. ULM WARHAWKS

SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIP

JAMES MADISON OVER TEXAS STATE

ALL-SUN BELT TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE		
QB	BRAYLON BRAXTON	Southern Miss
RB	GEORGE PETTAWAY	James Madison
RB	KENTREL BULLOCK	South Alabama
AP	LINCOLN PARE	Texas State
WR	TED HURST	Georgia State
WR	COREY RUCKER	Arkansas State
WR	DEVIN VOISIN	South Alabama
TE	ETHAN CONNER	Troy
C	ELI RUSS	Troy
OL	PAT McMURTRIE	James Madison
OL	DORION STRAWN	Texas State
OL	CALEB COOK	Georgia Southern
OL	ZACH BARLEV	Old Dominion

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE		
DL	JORDAN LAWSON	Louisiana
DL	BRYAN WHITEHEAD	Arkansas State
DL	KRIS TRINIDAD	Old Dominion
DL	KEVONTAY WELLS	ULM
DL	IMMANUEL BUSH	James Madison
LB	JASON HENDERSON	Old Dominion
LB	BLAYNE MYRICK	South Alabama
LB	JORDAN STRINGER	Troy
CB	JOSH MOTEN	Southern Miss
CB	CHANCE GAMBLE	Georgia Southern
S	JACOB THOMAS	James Madison
S	WYDETT WILLIAMS JR.	ULM

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS		
K	CLUNE VAN ANDEL	Arkansas State
P	ALEX SMITH	Georgia Southern
KR	IAN FOSTER	Southern Miss
PR	BEAU SPARKS	Texas State

BOWL PROJECTIONS

IS4S Salute to Veterans: Arkansas State vs. Central Michigan

Frisco: Old Dominion vs. North Texas

Boca Raton: James Madison vs. Memphis

New Orleans: Louisiana vs. WKU

Myrtle Beach: Georgia Southern vs. UConn

68 Ventures: South Alabama vs. East Carolina

New Mexico: Texas State vs. Fresno State

JOIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL EXPERT STEVE LASSAN AT ATHLONSPORTS.COM FOR A LOOK AT SECOND- AND THIRD-TEAM SELECTIONS

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

APPALACHIAN STATE
Offense: New: Dowell Loggains
Old: Frank Ponce
Defense: New: DJ Smith
Old: Scot Sloan

ARKANSAS STATE
Defene: New: Griff McCarley
Old: Rob Harley

COASTAL CAROLINA
Offense: New: Drew Hollingshead
Old: Travis Trickett
Defense: New: Jeremiah Johnson
Old: Craig Naivar

GEORGIA STATE
Offense: New: Hue Jackson
Old: Jim Chaney
Defense: New: Travis Pearson
Old: Kevin Sherrer

JAMES MADISON
Defense: New: Colin Hitschler
Old: Lyle Hemphill

MARSHALL
Offense: New: Rod Smith
Old: Seth Doege
Defense: New: Shannon Morrison
Old: Jason Semore

SOUTH ALABAMA
Offense: New: Paul Petrino
Old: Rob Ezell
Defense: New: Jason Washington, Will Windham
Old: Will Windham

SOUTHERN MISS
Offense: New: Blake Anderson
Old: Jack Walker (interim)
Defense: New: Jason Semore
Old: Clay Bignell

TEXAS STATE
Offense: New: Landon Keopple, Jordan Shoemaker
Old: Mack Leftwich

JOSH MOTEN, SOUTHERN MISS
BRAYLON BRAXTON, SOUTHERN MISS

FROM LEFT: BARBARA J. PERENIC/COLUMBUS DISPATCH; MATTHEW DOBBINS-USA TODAY SPORTS

TOP TRANSFERS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	FORMER SCHOOL
1.	Josh Moten	DB	Southern Miss	Marshall
	A ball hawk with six career interceptions, Moten followed Charles Huff to Hattiesburg.			
2.	Braylon Braxton	QB	Southern Miss	Marshall
	The All-Sun Belt performer also joined Huff on the Golden Eagles.			
3.	Walker Howard	QB	Louisiana	Ole Miss
	Howard didn't play much in the SEC, but he has a chance to shine in Lafayette.			
4.	Matthew Sluka	QB	James Madison	UNLV
	Sluka reunites with former FCS Holy Cross head coach Bob Chesney.			
5.	Zach Palmer-Smith	RB	ULM	Richmond
	One of the top rushers in the FCS in 2024, Palmer-Smith replaces Ahmad Hardy.			
6.	AJ Swann	QB	Appalachian State	LSU
	Swann brings SEC starting experience to new head coach Dowell Loggains' offense.			
7.	Javante Mackey	LB	Arkansas State	Memphis
	Mackey returns to the Red Wolves after missing all of last season while injured.			
8.	Nick DeGennaro	WR	James Madison	Richmond
	Former FCS All-American joined Spiders QB Camden Coleman at JMU.			
9.	Rashod Dubinion	RB	Appalachian State	Arkansas
	Dubinion adds pass-catching ability to the Mountaineers' backfield.			
10.	Brendan Harrington	LB	Georgia Southern	Appalachian State
	Coming off a career year in his first healthy season since 2021.			

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Georgia State (73)	6. Coastal Carolina (88)	11. James Madison (111)
2. Arkansas State (77)	7. Texas State (91)	12. Appalachian St. (112)
3. Louisiana (80)	8. South Alabama (95)	13. ULM (115)
4. Troy (81)	9. Old Dominion (105)	14. Marshall (126)
5. Georgia Southern (86)	10. Southern Miss (108)	

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

Sept. 6	Georgia Southern at USC	**Oct. 28**	James Madison at Texas State
Sept. 6	Arkansas State at Arkansas	**Nov. 6**	Ga. Southern at Appalachian St.
Sept. 27	Ga. Southern at James Madison	**Nov. 22**	Marshall at Appalachian State
Oct. 4	South Alabama at Troy	**Nov. 22**	Southern Miss at South Alabama
Oct. 18	Georgia State at Ga. Southern	**Nov. 29**	ULM at Louisiana
Oct. 25	Ga. Southern at Arkansas State	**Nov. 29**	South Alabama at Texas State

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jayden Gloston	CB	Louisiana	★★★	674
2.	Damarcco Blanton	WR	Arkansas State	★★★	33*
3.	Russell Babineaux	WR	Louisiana	★★★	727
4.	DJ Avery Jr.	WR	Georgia State	★★★	843
5.	Weston Bryan	ATH	Georgia Southern	★★★	847
6.	Zach Ruffin	S	Southern Miss	★★★	880
7.	D'Shaun Ford	RB	ULM	★★★	984
8.	Dariyonne Bryant	WR	Troy	★★★	46*
9.	Donnie Smith	LB	Troy	★★★	47*
10.	Julyon Jordan	RB	South Alabama	★★★	934

*Rankings per On3 industry ranking; *Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 103 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 5-6, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE New head coach Dowell Loggains, with a background in both the NFL and SEC, set about rebuilding the Mountaineers' roster quickly. Of the 16 transfers who joined the team in January, 10 were offensive players after Appalachian State averaged just 26.6 points per game last season.

The Mountaineers have two former power-conference quarterbacks to choose from in transfers AJ Swann (LSU) and JJ Kohl (Iowa State). Rashod Dubinion, an Arkansas transfer, should boost the output at running back along with Tennessee transfer Khalifa Keith. Another Arkansas transfer, 6-foot-4 Davion Dozier, will help at wide receiver, where Dalton Stroman (five touchdown catches in 2024) is a returning contributor.

The question is whether or not a rebuilt offensive line will provide the protection needed to make this unit more productive.

DEFENSE Loggains and his staff take over a defense that was third-worst in the Sun Belt, allowing 32.9 points per game. After the Mountaineers intercepted only four passes last season, transfers Dylan Hasz (Arkansas) and Cristian Conyer (Coastal Carolina) arrived to help. But can the new defensive schemes lead to more production from holdovers, like senior cornerback Ethan Johnson, junior safety DJ Burks and sophomore safety Zyeir Gamble?

Up front, rush end Shawn Collins returns as a force along with outside linebacker Thomas Davis. They combined for five sacks last season, but the Mountaineers need more from them this season. Senior Kyle Arnholt and Missouri transfer Brayshawn Littlejohn will help at linebacker.

SPECIALISTS Jackson Moore showed promise as a freshman placekicker a year ago, playing in six games and making all 16 of his extra points and 4-of-6 field goals. He should give the Mountaineers a steady performer at that important spot. A part-time punter last season, Mitchell Lake averaged just 38.2 yards on his 11 punts. He's in line to start this season.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Mountaineers posted their first losing season since 2013 (their final year in the FCS) and only their second in the past three decades last season — hence the coaching change. Loggains turned the roster over, adding 16 transfers in time for spring practice with more roster changes coming in the spring portal window. Swann and Kohl have power conference experience at quarterback but are being asked to run a program for an entire season for the first time. Appalachian State's schedule features a game at Boise State and a home game with Oregon State. Leading the Mountaineers to a winning record is Loggains' goal, and his roster turnover should make it possible.

2024 RESULTS (5-6, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 31	East Tennessee State	W	38-10
Sept. 7	at Clemson	L	20-66
Sept. 14	at East Carolina	W	21-19
Sept. 19	South Alabama	L	14-48
Oct. 5	at Marshall	L	37-52
Oct. 12	at Louisiana	L	24-34
Oct. 26	Georgia State	W	33-26
Nov. 2	Old Dominion	W	28-20
Nov. 7	at Coastal Carolina	L	24-38
Nov. 23	James Madison	W	34-20
Nov. 30	at Georgia Southern	L	20-29

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Charlotte #
Sept. 6	Lindenwood
Sept. 13	at Southern Miss
Sept. 27	at Boise State
Oct. 4	Oregon State
Oct. 11	at Georgia State
Oct. 18	Coastal Carolina
Oct. 25	at Old Dominion
Nov. 6	Georgia Southern
Nov. 15	at James Madison
Nov. 22	Marshall
Nov. 29	Arkansas State

#Bank of America Stadium

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaquari Lewis, RB	★★★
2.	Denell Nix, IOL	★★★
3.	Max Guest, RB	★★★
4.	Aljonon Oliver, IOL	★★★
5.	Caleb Pitts, DL	★★★
6.	Noah Gillon, QB	★★★
7.	Alex Sanchez, WR	★★★
8.	Edward Coleman, WR	★★★
9.	Ja'Torian Mack, S	★★★
10.	Dillon Galloway, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dowell Loggains • Record at School: First Season • Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Dowell Loggains • Defensive Coordinator: DJ Smith • Location, Boone, N.C. • Stadium: Kidd Brewer Stadium (30,000)

DALTON STROMAN

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"They went bust last year; it was a pretty big surprise around the league. They've had talented rosters for the last few seasons and have legit matchup problem guys on offense, but the defense just imploded on them. ... They made it a point to get away from 'App guys' and the 'App way' because they did that multiple times during [Shawn] Clark's run there, and it didn't work out. ... I think new blood can't hurt right now because they weren't getting the best out of those players on the field. [Dowell] Loggains is interesting because he's got a lot of pro experience. He's not a particular X-system type of guy. But in the short term, it's a recruiting job first, and this is a different, harder league than when App was dominating. It will take a little time here."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	8	Dalton Stroman (Sr.)	1	Davion Dozier (So.)
WR	3	Jaden Barnes (Jr.)	84	Ayden Burkey (So.)
WR	0	William Fowles (So.)	82	Chris Lawson Jr. (So.)
LT	62	Tyriq Poindexter (Sr.)	76	Luke Burgess (So.)
LG	74	Griffin Scroggs (Jr.)	66	Danny Stevens (So.)
C	73	Will Flowers (Sr.)	64	Michael Marotta (Sr.)
RG	**63**	**JAYDEN RAMSEY (SR.)**	68	Lance Williams (So.)
RT	55	Shamarr Jackson (Sr.)	76	Luke Burgess (So.)
TE	85	David Larkins (Sr.)	44	Jared Gibble (Sr.)
QB	5	AJ Swann (Jr.)	17	JJ Kohl (So.)
RB	7	Rashod Dubinion (Sr.)	4	Khalifa Keith (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	12	Shawn Collins (Sr.)	3	Joseph Bakhole (Sr.)
DT	98	Jason Hertz (So.)	99	Bucci Farmer (Fr.)
DT	45	Nick Campbell (Jr.)	95	Kaden Ellis (Fr.)
DE	97	Kevin Abrams-Verwayne (Sr.)	93	DeNigel Cooper (Fr.)
OLB	**15**	**THOMAS DAVIS (SR.)**	28	Jayden Bethea (So.)
LB	**56**	**KYLE ARNHOLT (SR.)**	35	Brooks Yurachek (So.)
LB	12	Brayshawn Littlejohn (So.)	42	Braxton Veiga (So.)
CB	2	Ethan Johnson (Sr.)		Dylan Hasz (Jr.)
CB	24	Cristian Conyer (Jr.)	36	Tyshawn Sanders (Fr.)
S	**21**	**DJ BURKS (JR.)**	17	Zyeir Gamble (So.)
S	**7**	**JORDAN FAVORS (SR.)**	13	Elijah Mc-Cantos (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	2	Jackson Moore (So.)	KR	14	Kanye Roberts (Jr.)
P	49	Mitchell Lake (So.)	PR	4	Khalifa Keith (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JAMES GUILLORY-IMAGN IMAGES

JAMESON TUCKER

SCOUTING THE CHANTICLEERS

"Things look a little messy here. They made an in-season play-calling change and got worse on offense. It's hard to tell what they want to do moving forward. It's probably going to be a more Air Raid-style offense. ... Grabbing [defensive coordinator Jeremiah] Johnson from Louisiana Tech was a really big move; his LA Tech defenses were really great, but it's a lateral move in terms of the available talent. ... It's hard to evaluate them because there's a tremendous amount of guys coming in and out. That's adding to the questions about the overall state of the program. ... They have a very open QB competition and might go looking in the portal over the summer. ... This program might have more questions around it than any other team in our league that didn't change its head coach."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)				
WR	8	**JAMESON TUCKER (SR.)**	4	Bryson Graves (Jr.)
WR	9	Malick Meiga (Sr.)	15	Malcolm Gillie (Sr.)
WR	17	**CAMERON WRIGHT (SR.)**	13	Colton Hinton (Jr.)
LT	62	**NICK DEL GRANDE (JR.)**	68	Joseph Hanson (Jr.)
LG	51	**HESTON EDWARDS (SR.)**	73	**ANTHONY WALTON (SR.)**
C	57	**ZAC ELAM (SR.)**	59	Cam Todd (Jr.)
RG	58	**THOMAS JOHNSON (SR.)**	61	Julius Tate (So.)
RT	70	Daniel Jones (So.)	56	Tray Franklin (Jr.)
TE	18	Cane Berrong (Sr.)	33	Zach Courtney (Jr.)
QB	12	Tad Hudson (So.)	7	MJ Morris (Jr.)
RB	21	Jalen John (Sr.)	5	Ja'Vin Simpkins (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	52	Ibrahim Diawara (Jr.)	42	Noah Arinze (Sr.)
NT	99	**SAWYER GORAM-WELCH (SR.)**	92	Keenen Hatcher (Fr.)
DT	91	Aamarii Notice (Sr.)	98	Travis Nesbitt (Sr.)
OLB	40	Jayden Bryant (So.)	46	Javen Augustus (Jr.)
ILB	1	**SHANE BRUCE (SR.)**	55	Tray Brown (Jr.)
ILB	34	**WYATT GEDEON (JR.)**	30	Dontae Lunan (Sr.)
HUSKY	19	Se'Von McDowell (So.)	14	Myles Woods (So.)
CB	8	Myles Mooyoung (Sr.)	17	Lionell Whitaker (Sr.)
CB	15	Zach Cody (So.)	18	Fredd Adams (Jr.)
S	9	Dre Pinckney (Sr.)	12	Avyonne Jones (Jr.)
S	6	Xamarion Gordon (Sr.)	11	Jeffrey Ugochukwu (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	48	Haden Tessier (Jr.)	KR 5	Ja'Vin Simpkins (Jr.)
P	97	Emile Sebafundi (Sr.)	PR 4	Bryson Graves (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DANNY WILD-USA TODAY SPORTS

COASTAL CAROLINA CHANTICLEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 102 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE Coastal has a new offensive coordinator and will have a new starting quarterback with the transfer of two-year starter Ethan Vasko to Liberty. Third-year head coach Tim Beck fired offensive coordinator Travis Trickett midseason last year and replaced him in January with Drew Hollingshead, a Mike Leach Air Raid disciple who spent the past two seasons leading WKU's fast-paced offense.

The quarterback position may be a four-player race. Tad Hudson, a 2024 North Carolina transfer, is the quasi-incumbent, throwing for 173 yards and two TDs without a turnover in CCU's bowl loss to UTSA. Beck also brought in transfer MJ Morris (1,717 career passing yards, 19 touchdowns, 11 interceptions at NC State and Maryland), junior-college transfer Samari Collier and junior Emmett Brown (1,551 passing yards, 16 TDs in six starts at San José State in 2024).

Five starters return from a solid offensive line. Ja'Vin Simpkins, who is coming off a redshirt season due to injuries, is the lone returning running back, and Jalen John arrives from UMass. Jameson Tucker (team-leading 33 catches, 574 yards, six TDs last season) is one of several returners at wide receiver, and multiple tight ends are back, though none with more than 12 catches in 2024.

DEFENSE Following a successful season at Louisiana Tech, Jeremiah Johnson is in his fifth stop in five years as Coastal's new defensive coordinator. His new unit lost multiple players to Power 4 programs.

Linebacker may be the strongest position, returning starting inside linebackers Shane Bruce and Wyatt Gedeon along with Tray Brown and Se'Von McDowell. Sawyer Goram-Welch, a 2024 Texas transfer, is a returning starter at nose tackle, one of five returnees up front.

The secondary will need an overhaul. Redshirt senior safety Dre Pinckney returns from injury, but few others have experience at CCU, which signed seven defensive backs from other colleges or junior colleges prior to spring practice.

SPECIALISTS CCU lost placekicker Kade Hensley to the portal but returns Australian punter Emile Sebafundi (41.2-yard average), as well as the speedy Simpkins, a weapon on kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Coastal lost approximately 40 players through the transfer portal — five to Power 4 programs — and added more than 40 players of their own. The turnover, combined with new coordinators and several new assistants, means that Beck needs the team to jell quickly to avoid a further decline from records of 8-5 and 6-7 in his first two seasons after CCU won 31 games in the three years before his arrival.

2024 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 29	at Jacksonville State	W	55-27
Sept. 7	William & Mary	W	40-21
Sept. 14	at Temple	W	28-20
Sept. 21	Virginia	L	24-43
Oct. 5	Old Dominion	W	45-37
Oct. 10	at James Madison	L	7-39
Oct. 19	Louisiana	L	24-34
Nov. 2	at Troy	L	24-38
Nov. 7	Appalachian State	W	38-24
Nov. 16	at Marshall	L	19-31
Nov. 23	Georgia Southern	L	6-26
Nov. 30	at Georgia State	W	48-27
Dec. 23	UTSA #	L	15-44

#Myrtle Beach Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Virginia
Sept. 6	Charleston Southern
Sept. 13	East Carolina
Sept. 20	at South Alabama
Oct. 4	at Old Dominion
Oct. 11	ULM
Oct. 18	at Appalachian State
Oct. 30	Marshall
Nov. 8	Georgia State
Nov. 15	at Georgia Southern
Nov. 22	at South Carolina
Nov. 29	James Madison

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brandon Rose, S	★★★
2.	Javen Augustus, EDGE	★★★
3.	Ben Verges, TE	★★★
4.	Jevon Edwards, RB	★★★
5.	Dominic Rijos, IOL	★★★
6.	Cam Todd, IOL	★★★
7.	Dominic Knicely, WR	★★★
8.	Dwayne White, WR	★★★
9.	Nate Gregory, LB	★★★
10.	Larell Howling, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Beck • Record at School: 14-12 (2 years) • Career Record: 14-12 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Drew Hollingshead • Defensive Coordinator: Jeremiah Johnson • Location: Conway, S.C. • Stadium: Brooks Stadium (21,000)

GEORGIA SOUTHERN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 91 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 6-2 SBC

OFFENSE Georgia Southern returns quarterback JC French IV, who threw for 2,831 and 17 touchdowns in 2024. Of his 11 interceptions, four of them came in the Eagles' bowl loss to Sam Houston. French started all 13 games and was the team's third-leading rusher with 239 yards and two touchdowns.

The Eagles lose their top running back in Jalen White. Senior OJ Arnold will look to fill his shoes after amassing 461 yards from scrimmage with six touchdowns in 2024.

Georgia Southern lost leading receiver Derwin Burgess Jr. and LV Bunkley-Shelton, but the Eagles return Josh Dallas, who had 614 receiving yards and led the team with six touchdown catches. Dalen Cobb also returns for his senior season after posting 599 yards and four scores. Other receivers in the mix include Marcus Sanders Jr. and Auburn transfer Camden Brown, who showed a lot of promise in the spring.

The offensive line should be another strength for Georgia Southern, as four of the five projected starters saw significant playing time in 2024.

DEFENSE The biggest loss on defense is 2024 Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year Marques Watson-Trent, who transferred to Nebraska for his final year of eligibility. The Eagles also lost defensive back Marc Stampley II and lineman Elhadj Fall to the transfer portal. They did get a few key players via the portal, including linebackers Brendan Harrington from Appalachian State and Brandon Tyson from FCS Elon and defensive backs AJ Brown Sr. from Ole Miss and Jayden Davis from Georgia Tech.

Latrell Bullard (35 tackles, 4.5 for a loss) anchors the unit along with Davion Rhodes (23 tackles, 6.0 TFLs) and Da'Shawn Davis (25 tackles, 3.5 TFLs).

SPECIALISTS TJ Hartley III was slotted as the Eagles kicker for 2025 but entered the transfer portal in April. The only kicker on the Eagles roster is Ireland native Donal Dempsey, who has never played in a college football game. The Eagles return Aussie punter Alex Smith, who averaged 42.7 yards per punt, with 19 downed inside the 20-yard line.

FINAL ANALYSIS Georgia Southern posted its best record under head coach Clay Helton in 2024, going 8-5 and 6-2 in Sun Belt play. And for the first time under Helton, the Eagles return their starting quarterback, which should allow their momentum to continue. There are weapons on offense, and several transfers impressed in the spring. Both trenches appear strong. Helton simply needs to integrate the newcomers successfully and identify a placekicker for the Eagles to go bowling once again.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 6-2 SBC)

Aug. 31	Boise State	L	45-56
Sept. 7	at Nevada	W	20-17
Sept. 14	South Carolina State	W	42-14
Sept. 21	at Ole Miss	L	13-52
Sept. 28	at Georgia State	W	38-21
Oct. 12	Marshall	W	24-23
Oct. 19	James Madison	W	28-14
Oct. 24	at Old Dominion	L	19-47
Nov. 2	at South Alabama	W	34-30
Nov. 16	Troy	L	20-28
Nov. 23	at Coastal Carolina	W	26-6
Nov. 30	Appalachian State	W	29-20
Dec. 19	vs. Sam Houston #	L	26-31

#New Orleans Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Fresno State
Sept. 6	at USC
Sept. 13	Jacksonville State
Sept. 20	Maine
Sept. 27	at James Madison
Oct. 9	Southern Miss
Oct. 18	Georgia State
Oct. 25	at Arkansas State
Nov. 6	at Appalachian State
Nov. 15	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 22	Old Dominion
Nov. 29	at Marshall

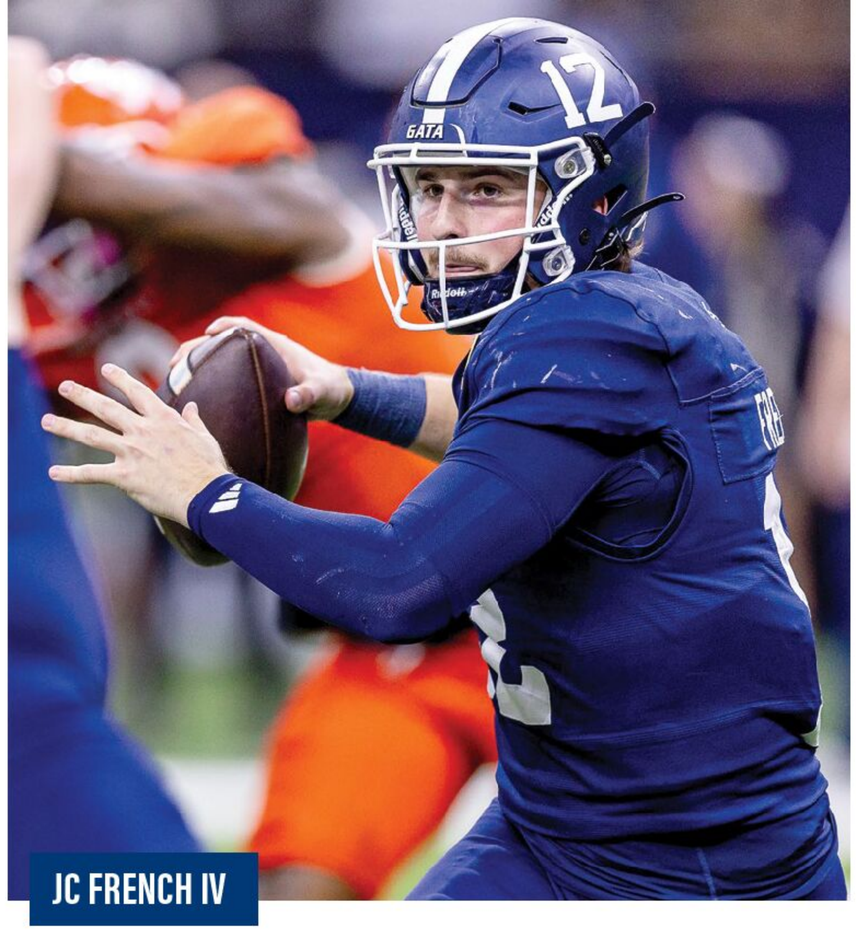
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Weston Bryan, ATH	★★★★
2.	Amari Wilson, EDGE	★★★
3.	Charlie Johnston, QB	★★★
4.	Jeremiah Ticket, DL	★★★
5.	Ethan Johnson, LB	★★★
6.	Jeremiah Ware, WR	★★★
7.	Elijah Ffrench, S	★★★
8.	Braxtin McLester, LB	★★★
9.	Issac Turner, OT	★★★
10.	Brandon Stoner, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clay Helton • Record at School: 20-19 (3 years)
Career Record: 66-43 (9+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Aplin
Defensive Coordinator: Brandon Bailey • Location: Statesboro, Ga.
Stadium: Paulson Stadium (25,000)



JC FRENCH IV

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"It's between these guys and JMU in the East, at least on paper. They should feel pretty good after last season; they've got an offensive rhythm for the first time since Clay [Helton] got there. ... Since that staff took over, they grab a signature win early and look like they're going to dominate, and then struggle in November and fall apart down the stretch. It wasn't as bad last year, but they shouldn't lose to a first-year outfit like Troy. They were a game away from playing for a conference championship. ... They want to be selective about the portal and still define themselves on Georgia and Florida high school players. This could be their most talented roster under this staff. ... That program expects titles, and they haven't seen one yet."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	19	Josh Dallas (Jr.)	5	Marcus Sanders Jr. (Sr.)
WR	1	**DALEN COBB (SR.)**	89	Taylor Bradshaw (So.)
WR	17	Camden Brown (Sr.)	13	Dylan Gary (Jr.)
LT	64	Caelan Williams (Sr.)	50	Jaylen Slaughter (Fr.)
LG	74	**PICHON WIMBLEY (SR.)**	58	Kyle Frazier (Sr.)
C	57	Chandler Strong (Jr.)	54	**CHANCE CARROLL (SR.)**
RG	78	**CALEB COOK (SR.)**	76	Kingtriton Samuela (Fr)
RT	71	Robert Wright Jr. (So.)	66	Johnnie Brown III (Jr.)
TE	84	JP Mikhael (So.)	85	Ahmon Green (Sr.)
QB	12	**JC FRENCH IV (JR.)**	6	Tyler Budge (Fr.)
RB	22	OJ Arnold (Sr.)	21	David Mbadinga (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	52	Jacob Ferguson (Sr.)	18	MJ Stroud (Jr.)
DT	55	Korey Jordan (Fr.)	56	Kyron Anderson (Fr.)
DT	57	**LATRELL BULLARD (SR.)**	98	Uche Iloh (Fr.)
DE	90	Da'Shawn Davis (Sr.)	91	Davion Rhodes (Sr.)
LB	4	Davon Hicks (Sr.)	19	Brendan Harrington (Sr.)
LB	15	Brandon Tyson (Jr.)	34	Jamari Whitehead (So.)
CB	12	**TRACY HILL JR. (JR.)**	23	Dorrian Smith (Sr.)
CB	31	**CHANCE GAMBLE (SR.)**	20	Jaquari Brown (Fr.)
NB	25	**AYDEN JACKSON (JR.)**	23	Dorrian Smith (Sr.)
S	17	Jayden Davis (So.)	29	Devin Collier (Fr.)
S	9	**JUSTIN MEYERS (SR.)**	14	Prince Green III (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Donal Dempsey (Fr.)	KR	1	Dalen Cobb (Sr.)
P	81	Alex Smith (Jr.)	PR	19	Josh Dallas (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

STEPHEN LEW-IMAGN IMAGES

TED HURST

BRETT DAVIS-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"Honestly, it's still a work in progress, and it's really hard to read. [Dell] McGee isn't shy about flipping that roster over, and they've signed an absolute ton of guys. They brought in a really talented recruiting class and have a couple really talented pieces, like the receiver [Javon Robinson]. ... If you take away the Vanderbilt upset, they did pretty much what you'd expect for a first-year, first-time head coach who came on late in a recruiting cycle. ... They're not going to be good on the field again this season, but you have to give McGee time. They almost broke the top 50 nationally in recruiting with that class, so you can see the vision; it's just a few seasons out. Their biggest concern is going to be protecting their roster from the portal as they grow."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	16	**TED HURST (SR.)**		Ahmed Souare (Fr.)
WR	3	Leo Blackburn (Sr.)		D'onte Fulton (Fr)
WR	10	DJ Riles (Jr.)	5	Javon Robinson (Jr.)
LT		Derrell Bailey Jr. (Sr.)	69	Jeremiah McCrimmon (Sr)
LG	56	Deandre Duffus (Jr.)	73	AJ Andrews (Fr.)
C	54	Tyhler Williams (Sr.)	**70**	**ALEC JOHNSON (JR.)**
RG	75	Neil Sledge (So.)	53	Malik Jackson (Fr.)
RT	68	Mason Cook (Sr.)	60	Dominic Johnson (Fr.)
TE		Camden Overton (So.)	88	Lane Wadle (So.)
QB	8	Cameran Brown (Sr.)	**11**	**CHRISTIAN VEILLEUX (SR.)**
RB		Rashad Amos (Sr.)	2	Djay Braswell (Jr.)
DEFENSE (2)				
DE	11	Ian Mathews (Jr.)		Marlin Dean (Sr.)
DT	**10**	**HENRY BRYANT (SR.)**	40	Sir Mells (Jr.)
DT	**56**	**FUCHES LEWIS II (SR.)**	16	Bishop Thomas (Jr.)
DL	98	Jaden Roper (Jr.)		Jonah Reeder (Sr.)
OLB	9	Marlin Dean (Sr.)	25	Josiah Robinson (Jr.)
ILB	45	Damaine Wilson (So.)	25	Josiah Robinson (Jr.)
CB	18	Chams Diagne (Jr.)		Bernard Causey III (Fr.)
CB	12	Sam McCall (Jr.)		Bernard Causey III (Fr.)
S	4	D-Icey Hopkins (Jr.)	26	Deuce Walker (Fr.)
S		Jordan Huff (Jr.)	22	Ja'Maric Morris (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	15	Braeden McAlister (Jr.)	KR 10	DJ Riles (Jr.)
P	91	Reed Chandley (So.)	PR 10	DJ Riles (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

GEORGIA STATE PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 122 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 SBC

OFFENSE The Panthers will continue to evaluate quarterbacks until the week before the season opener, just like they did a year ago. Cameran Brown, a transfer from Texas Tech, emerged from spring practice as a tenuous No. 1, although returner Christian Veilleux played 10 games last year (2,047 yards, 13 TD passes) and led the team to a last-minute win over Vanderbilt. The staff prefers a dual-threat quarterback and will continue to evaluate Texas State transfer PJ Hatter and true freshman TJ Stanley.

Wide receiver Ted Hurst was an All-Sun Belt pick (56 catches, 961 yards, nine TDs); he has exceptional hands and deep-threat ability. DJ Riles (20 catches) moved up the depth chart with a good spring.

The offensive line will be bigger and more athletic — one of the main goals for the offseason. Right tackle Mason Cook will lead the way after three starters hit the portal. Transfer Derrell Bailey Jr. is expected to take over at left tackle.

The backfield has three imports in Ole Miss transfer Rashad Amos, a former 1,000-yard rusher in the MAC at Miami (Ohio); Djay Braswell, a South Carolina transfer with breakaway speed; and Cody Brown.

DEFENSE Defensive linemen Henry Bryant (30 tackles, 5.5 tackles for a loss, four sacks) and linebacker Damaine Wilson (39 tackles) were both honorable mention all-conference picks in 2024.

The secondary returns safety D-Icey Hopkins (23 tackles, two interceptions). But safety Jeremiah Johnson, the team's leading tackler, and cornerback Jyron Gilmore (53 tackles, two interceptions) both transferred. In fact, seven of the top 10 tacklers from last year either transferred out or graduated, but that isn't necessarily bad since the Panthers ranked next-to-last in the Sun Belt with 33.8 points allowed per game and dead last with only 18 sacks.

SPECIALISTS Braeden McAlister handled all the kickoffs and longer field goals. Liam Rickman was reliable on shorter field goals (14-for-19). Punter Reed Chandley, a transfer from FCS Houston Christian, will replace Aussie James Allen, the second-team all-conference pick.

FINAL ANALYSIS Second-year head coach Dell McGee focused his offseason on trying to find players who better fit his fast-paced style. The recruiting class is considered one of the best harvested by a Group of 5 team. With all the new faces, McGee stressed fundamentals like clock management and correct alignment, while also conveying higher expectations.

There is little time to mature because of the team's aggressive non-conference schedule that includes visits to SEC opponents Ole Miss and Vanderbilt and a home date with bowl team Memphis.

2024 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 SBC)

Aug. 31	at Georgia Tech	L	12-35
Sept. 7	Chattanooga	W	24-21
Sept. 14	Vanderbilt	W	36-32
Sept. 28	Georgia Southern	L	21-38
Oct. 12	Old Dominion	L	14-21
Oct. 17	at Marshall	L	20-35
Oct. 26	at Appalachian State	L	26-33
Nov. 1	at UConn	L	27-34
Nov. 9	at James Madison	L	7-38
Nov. 16	Arkansas State	L	20-27
Nov. 23	at Texas State	W	52-44
Nov. 30	Coastal Carolina	L	27-48

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Ole Miss
Sept. 6	Memphis
Sept. 13	Murray State
Sept. 20	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 4	James Madison
Oct. 11	Appalachian State
Oct. 18	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 23	South Alabama
Nov. 8	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 15	Marshall
Nov. 22	at Troy
Nov. 29	at Old Dominion

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Derrick Avery, WR	★★★★
2.	Ladainnian Martin, RB	★★★
3.	Tojuan Peyton Jr., RB	★★★
4.	D'onte Fulton, WR	★★★
5.	Jartavius Flounoy, DL	★★★
6.	Ty Snead, S	★★★
7.	Kelan Butler, EDGE	★★★
8.	Jaden Roper, DL	★★★
9.	Kyle Washington, WR	★★★
10.	Grant Hollier, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dell McGee • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-9 (1+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Hue Jackson
Defensive Coordinator: Travis Pearson • Location: Atlanta, Ga. • Stadium: Center Parc Stadium (24,333)

JAMES MADISON DUKES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 59 | SBC EAST PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 SBC

OFFENSE After throwing for 2,598 yards with 26 touchdowns and four interceptions in 2024, Alonza Barnett III injured his knee on the final play of the regular season. Though his recovery is ahead of schedule, his availability for 2025 is in question. Two potential starters were added via the portal: Matthew Sluka from UNLV and FCS Richmond's Camden Coleman. They join redshirt freshman JC Evans, who also played well in the bowl game. Sluka may have the edge in the competition having spent four years at FCS Holy Cross with JMU head coach Bob Chesney.

The Dukes bring back running backs Ayo Adeyi and George Pettaway, both of whom have produced 900-yard rushing campaigns in their careers. FCS Villanova transfer Jaylan Sanchez will likely replace outgoing Yamir Knight as the starter in the slot, and Iowa State transfer Isaiah Alston boosts the depth.

DEFENSE A couple of monster edge rushers are gone with the loss of Eric O'Neill and Khairi Manns. In addition, linebacker Jacob Dobbs was a team leader, and Terrence Spence earned All-America honors in the secondary, leaving JMU with some major voids to fill on defense.

Big defensive tackle Immanuel Bush returns to help jam up the middle, while FCS Maine transfer Xavier Holmes should get an opportunity to start and fill the outside rusher void. Veteran linebacker Trent Hendrick should become a clear leader on defense.

JMU suffered a blow in the spring when cornerback Chauncey Logan, who had started since arriving on campus as a true freshman, entered the portal. Safety Jacob Thomas should be one of the best in the conference after making 72 tackles with three interceptions last season.

SPECIALISTS Cristiano Rosa will likely become the field-goal kicker with the transfer of Noe Ruelas to UCF. Rosa has range past 50 yards. JMU has to replace punter Ryan Hanson, an All-Sun Belt performer who had a frustrating senior season. The search for a replacement continues.

FINAL ANALYSIS JMU won nine games in Chesney's first season as head coach despite having several All-Sun Belt players follow Curt Cignetti to Indiana. But it was also the first time since moving to the FBS that the Dukes didn't finish atop the Sun Belt East standings.

There should be more continuity in Chesney's second year, and if he and Sluka recapture some of the dual-threat magic from their Holy Cross days, JMU's offense could be as dangerous as ever. A tough schedule could make topping last year's win total a challenge, but if they do, the Dukes could conceivably be in the mix for a College Football Playoff spot.

2024 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 SBC)

Aug. 31	at Charlotte	W	30-7
Sept. 7	Gardner-Webb	W	13-6
Sept. 21	at North Carolina	W	70-50
Sept. 28	Ball State	W	63-7
Oct. 5	at ULM	L	19-21
Oct. 10	Coastal Carolina	W	39-7
Oct. 19	at Georgia Southern	L	14-28
Oct. 26	Southern Miss	W	32-15
Nov. 9	Georgia State	W	38-7
Nov. 16	at Old Dominion	W	35-32
Nov. 23	at Appalachian State	L	20-34
Nov. 30	Marshall (ot)	L	33-35
Dec. 18	vs. WKU #	W	27-17

#Boca Raton Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Weber State
Sept. 6	at Louisville
Sept. 20	at Liberty
Sept. 27	Georgia Southern
Oct. 4	at Georgia State
Oct. 11	Louisiana
Oct. 18	Old Dominion
Oct. 28	at Texas State
Nov. 8	at Marshall
Nov. 15	Appalachian State
Nov. 22	Washington State
Nov. 29	at Coastal Carolina

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	JD Rayner, IOL	★★★
2.	Roy'Marr Thomas, EDGE	★★★
3.	Jamal Olford, CB	★★★
4.	Jerald James, EDGE	★★★
5.	Michael Scott, WR	★★★
6.	Jamarcus Smith, WR	★★★
7.	Brian Hnat, TE	★★★
8.	Seth Gathers, S	★★★
9.	Cole Webster, DL	★★★
10.	Grayson Gilmore, EDGE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bob Chesney • Record at School: 9-4 (1 year)
Career Record: 120-50 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dean Kennedy
Defensive Coordinator: Colin Hitschler • Location: Harrisonburg, Va.
Stadium: Bridgeforth Stadium (24,877)

JACOB THOMAS

SCOUTING THE DUKES

"This is a big year for evaluating that new staff. They won nine games last year even with losing a lot of key guys off that roster to Indiana and other places after Curt [Cignetti] left. Now it's gonna be all about what Bob [Chesney] and this new staff can do to keep that momentum going. They're really talented, they recruit well and they're smart about the portal. ... They've got a pretty interesting quarterback race going with the transfers they've brought in. I think it's telling — they probably don't think Alonza Barnett III will be ready in time. The Richmond transfer [Camden Coleman] was a star in FCS; I think he might have the advantage over [Matthew] Sluka. If they're settled at quarterback by summer camp, they should be one of the favorites to win the division."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR		Nick DeGennaro (Sr.)	81	Michael Scott (Fr.)
WR	0	Jaylan Sanchez (Sr.)	16	Landon Ellis (Jr.)
WR		Isaiah Alston (Sr.)	88	Dylan Williams (So.)
LT		Cam McNair (Sr.)	72	Josh Toner (Sr.)
LG	60	Zach Greenberg (Sr.)	50	Quincy Jenkins (Sr.)
C	70	Brett Davis (Sr.)	55	Riley Robell (So.)
RG	**60**	**CARTER SWEAZIE (JR.)**	73	Evan Bushong (Fr.)
RT	**76**	**PAT MCMURTRIE (SR.)**	79	Joseph Simmons (Jr.)
TE	18	Logan Kyle (Sr.)	15	Lacota Dippre (So.)
QB	9	Matthew Sluka (Sr.)	7	Camden Coleman (Jr)
RB	7	Ayo Adeyi (Sr.)	**6**	**GEORGE PETTAWAY (JR.)**

DEFENSE (4)

DE	8	Amar Thomas (Jr.)	95	Sahir West (Fr.)
DT	**15**	**IMMANUEL BUSH (SR.)**	90	Terry Lockett Jr. (Sr.)
DT	93	Mychal McMullin (So.)		Aiden Gobaira (Sr.)
DE	9	Xavier Holmes (Sr.)	91	Marcellus Nash (Fr.)
OLB	54	Brandon Fique (Sr.)	40	Jackson Snyder (So.)
MLB	**5**	**TRENT HENDRICK (SR.)**	10	JT Kouame-Yao (Sr.)
OLB	17	Gannon Weathersby (Jr.)	46	Immanuel Ezeogu (Fr.)
CB	6	Chantz Harley (Sr.)		Mekhi Rodgers (Sr.)
CB		Ken Willis (Sr.)	30	Justin Eaglin (Jr.)
S	**7**	**JACOB THOMAS (SR.)**	**32**	**DJ BARKSDALE (JR.)**
S	12	Kye Holmes (Sr.)	22	Chase Regan (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Cristiano Rosa (Sr.)	KR	Braeden Wisloski (Jr.)
P		TBD	PR 3	Wayne Knight (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ANDREW DIEB-USA TODAY SPORTS

TOBY PAYNE

SCOUTING THE THUNDERING HERD

"They're starting from scratch here. Everyone's going to be comparing them to Southern Miss for a while after the way things went down with [Charles] Huff and with how many guys followed him out the door. ... This is going to be fascinating to watch because you're talking about a conference champion where the coach and the school couldn't wait to be done with each other, and then he goes to another school in the same league. ... [Offensive coordinator] Rod Smith is a RichRod guy, so expect some similarities there to what they did at Jacksonville. ... Gibby [head coach Tony Gibson] has a ton of respect in coaching circles, and he's a veteran, and the staff reflects that. They're not under any kind of pressure this first season, and it's going to be a rebuild."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	8	Antonio Harmon (Jr.)	3	Bryan Robinson (Sr.)
WR	15	Zavier Short (Jr.)	10	Ben Turner (Sr.)
WR	11	Jakolbe Baldwin (Sr.)	4	Demarcus Lacey (Sr.)
LT	74	Tyler McDuffie (Sr.)	63	Bryce Biggs (Sr.)
LG	60	Shunmarkus Adams (Sr.)	69	Peyton Ellis (Jr.)
C	57	Eric Meeks (Sr.)	59	Evan Ferguson (Jr.)
RG	**70**	**JALEN SLAPPY (JR.)**	71	Morgan Scott (Jr.)
RT	76	Tariq Montgomery (Jr.)	77	Isaac Clary (So.)
TE	**81**	**TOBY PAYNE (JR.)**	85	Tracy Stephens (So.)
QB	7	Carlos Del Rio-Wilson (Jr.)	1	Zion Turner (Jr.)
RB	5	Jo'Shon Barbie (Jr.)	2	Michael Allen (Fr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	99	Jamaal Whyce Jr. (Jr.)	58	Braydin Ward (So.)
NT	5	KaTron Evans (Sr.)	98	Tyas Martin (Sr.)
DT	6	Jalil Rivera-Harvey (Sr.)	55	Paul Hutson III (Jr.)
LB	8	Jibreel Al-Amin (Jr.)	27	Cannon Lewis (Fr.)
LB	9	Javae Gilmore (Jr.)	10	Chason Clark (So.)
LB	7	Jayland Parker (Sr.)	22	Kerion Martin (Sr.)
CB	1	Boogie Trotter (Sr.)	2	Darrell Sweeting (So.)
CB	3	Marvae Myers-Glover (Sr.)	20	TaShawn Jeter (So.)
STAR	11	Josh Pierre-Louis (Sr.)	14	Philipp Davis (So.)
S	**4**	**JADARIUS GREEN-MCKNIGHT (SR.)**	18	Daniel Harris (So.)
S	17	Daytione Smith (Sr.)	26	Caleb Clark-Glover (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	93	Nathan Totten (So.)	KR	2 Michael Allen (Fr.)
P	93	Nathan Totten (So.)	PR	1 Boogie Trotter (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SAMANTHA MADAR/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MARSHALL THUNDERING HERD

NATIONAL FORECAST: 112 | SBC EAST PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 10-3, 7-1 SBC

OFFENSE Marshall's 2025 offense will feature a new look under coordinator Rod Smith, who comes to the Thundering Herd from Jacksonville State, where he produced the nation's third-best rushing attack in each of the past two seasons. The Herd return four players with starting experience to their offensive line, led by guard Jalen Slappy, and they add mammoth (6-9, 365) tackle Tyler McDuffie, a transfer from FCS Hampton, as well.

Quarterbacks Carlos Del Rio-Wilson and Zion Turner are in the mix for the starting job, and the running back room features a trio of transfers: Jo'Shon Barbie from FCS McNeese (841 rushing yds., eight TDs in 2024), Michael Allen from UNLV and Justin Williams-Thomas from Cal. Antwan Roberts is also back after missing last season due to injury.

Tight end Toby Payne (17 rec., 168 yds., six TDs) will be a key piece, while Antonio Harmon leads a stable of new but talented receivers.

DEFENSE Former Marshall great Shannon Morrison returns to lead the Herd defense, which will switch to the three-down scheme that first-year head coach Tony Gibson employed at NC State. The strength of this unit is the back end, which features returnees Daytione Smith and Jadarius Green-McKnight (38 tackles, INT last season) while adding talented perimeter defenders like Josh Pierre-Louis (FCS West Georgia), Marvae Myers-Glover (Middle Tennessee) and Boogie Trotter (Tennessee State).

Jibreel Al-Amin and Javae Gilmore join Jayland Parker at linebacker, while Charlotte transfer KaTron Evans provides a powerful force on the defensive front. This defense has plenty of speed and playmaking ability, so expect the team to pressure and force turnovers.

SPECIALISTS Nathan Totten will take over as the primary kickoff, punting and placekicking specialist. The Herd also added Lorcan Quinn, a former Gaelic football player with a powerful leg, to the kicking competition after spring practice. Quinn hit field goals of 68 and 69 yards during a kicking camp at IMG Academy in Florida in January and was the No. 1 kicker at Kohl's Kicking Academy earlier this year.

FINAL ANALYSIS Gibson takes over the defending Sun Belt Conference champion, which means he's going to get everyone's best shot in 2025. That starts with his first game — an Aug. 30 opener at Georgia. With 62 new players, chemistry is going to be critical. Smith's offensive attack has been successful everywhere he's been, so expect the Herd to put up points. If the defense's aggressive nature translates to turnovers, the Herd could be in line to make another run at a bowl appearance. They will have to overcome a brutal league road slate that includes trips to Louisiana, Coastal Carolina and Appalachian State, though.

2024 RESULTS (10-3, 7-1 SBC)

Aug. 31	Stony Brook	W	45-3
Sept. 7	at Virginia Tech	L	14-31
Sept. 21	at Ohio State	L	14-49
Sept. 28	Western Michigan	W	27-20
Oct. 5	Appalachian State	W	52-37
Oct. 12	at Georgia Southern	L	23-24
Oct. 17	Georgia State	W	35-20
Nov. 2	ULM	W	28-23
Nov. 9	at Southern Miss	W	37-3
Nov. 16	Coastal Carolina	W	31-19
Nov. 23	at Old Dominion	W	42-35
Nov. 30	at James Madison (ot)	W	35-33
Dec. 7	at Louisiana #	W	31-3

#SBC Championship

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Georgia
Sept. 6	Missouri State
Sept. 13	Eastern Kentucky
Sept. 20	at Middle Tennessee
Sept. 27	at Louisiana
Oct. 11	Old Dominion
Oct. 18	Texas State
Oct. 30	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 8	James Madison
Nov. 15	at Georgia State
Nov. 22	at Appalachian State
Nov. 29	Georgia Southern

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Camron Nti, S	★★★
2.	Eli Kaufman, IOL	★★★
3.	EahJay McAdams, LB	★★★
4.	Andrew Dudley, IOL	★★★
5.	Sherone White Jr., WR	★★★
6.	Jaasai Simmons, EDGE	★★★
7.	Rhett McGrew, TE	★★★
8.	Mekhi Lockhart, DL	★★★
9.	John Wetzel, S	★★★
10.	Jack Laird, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Gibson • Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season • Offensive Coordinator: Rod Smith
Defensive Coordinator: Shannon Morrison • Location: Huntington, W.Va.
Stadium: Joan C. Edwards Stadium (30,475)

OLD DOMINION MONARCHS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 95 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 SBC

OFFENSE All but one of the Monarchs' losses last season came by one possession, including a four-point defeat in the season opener at South Carolina. Old Dominion's offense finished middle of the pack in the Sun Belt, averaging 28 points per game, though quarterback Colton Joseph elevated that unit across his seven starts as a freshman.

Joseph's dual-threat abilities provided instant offense for ODU. He accounted for half of the team's 44 total touchdowns (11 passing, 11 rushing). Look for Joseph to run more often behind an offensive line anchored by left tackle Zach Barlev. With Aaron Young gone, running backs Devin Roche, Maurki James and Bryce Duke will spearhead the ground game.

The looming question is the receiver position, as Duke (58 yards) is the team's top returner. The Monarchs are counting on junior-college transfers, including former Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College teammates Ja'Cory Thomas and Tre Brown. Na'eem Abdul-Rahim Gladding is a homegrown talent who started the season finale against Arkansas State.

DEFENSE The big story on the other side of the ball is the return of All-America linebacker Jason Henderson, who redshirted last season to recover from a knee injury. Henderson headlines a veteran-led unit that returns several starters in the front seven, including leading tackler Koa Naotola (88) and sacks leader Kris Trinidad (5.5).

The Monarchs held up fine enough against the run in 2024, but their secondary was a real area of concern. That's where the defense saw the biggest upgrade with the addition of two Power 4 transfers in Botros Alisandro from Purdue and Nickendre Stiger from Kansas State.

ODU should be able to pressure opposing quarterbacks and stop the run with the heart of its defense returning. Forcing more turnovers and getting off the field on third down would go a long way for a Monarchs team that often lost the time of possession battle a season ago.

SPECIALISTS The Monarchs will be counting on a new kicker and punter this season. ODU added first-team All-Southland Conference placekicker Riley Callaghan from FCS Southeastern Louisiana. Callaghan went 17-of-22 on field goal tries last season and 26-of-27 on extra points. Ian Brandt, who was the Monarchs' holder in 2024, takes over as the punter. Roche could elevate the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS A full season of Joseph under center on offense and Henderson manning the middle on defense might just be what the Monarchs need to cobble together their first winning season since 2016. Turning some of those one-score losses into victories will likely take a few transfer success stories at wide receiver and in the secondary.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 SBC)

Aug. 31	at South Carolina	L	19-23
Sept. 7	East Carolina	L	14-20
Sept. 14	Virginia Tech	L	17-37
Sept. 28	at Bowling Green	W	30-27
Oct. 5	at Coastal Carolina	L	37-45
Oct. 12	at Georgia State	W	21-14
Oct. 19	Texas State	W	24-14
Oct. 24	Georgia Southern	W	47-19
Nov. 2	at Appalachian State	L	20-28
Nov. 16	James Madison	L	32-35
Nov. 23	Marshall	L	35-42
Nov. 30	at Arkansas State	W	40-32

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Indiana
Sept. 6	N. Carolina Central
Sept. 13	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 27	Liberty
Oct. 4	Coastal Carolina
Oct. 11	at Marshall
Oct. 18	at James Madison
Oct. 25	Appalachian State
Nov. 1	at ULM
Nov. 13	Troy
Nov. 22	at Georgia Southern
Nov. 29	Georgia State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tavares Murray, S	★★★
2.	Jehahj Sherrill, CB	★★★
3.	Josh Rodriguez, ATH	★★★
4.	Chris Warren, TE	★★★
5.	LeDarrion Menter, DL	★★★
6.	Andy Silverthorn, OT	★★★
7.	Justin Watts, CB	★★★
8.	Braden Ellis, OT	★★★
9.	Hunter Malecki, EDGE	★★★
10.	Ryan Huff, QB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ricky Rahne • Record at School: 20-30 (4 years) • Career Record: 20-30 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kevin Decker • Defensive Coordinator: Blake Seller • Location: Norfolk, Va. • Stadium: S.B. Ballard Stadium (21,944)

KRIS TRINIDAD

JEFF BLAKE-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOUTING THE MONARCHS

"Put these guys down as a maybe, kind of a dark horse in the East. They're not as talented as Georgia Southern or JMU, but Ricky [Rahne] has built these guys into a really solid threat. They embarrassed Georgia Southern last season and could've won any of those games they lost down the stretch. They should've been .500, and they're returning a lot of guys. ... [Colton] Joseph is a great quarterback, and they've built around him. That offense is really the identity of the program, and if they can catch up on defense, they can break through. They're a bowl team who could jump out and surprise some folks. I don't think anyone's paying attention to them outside of the Eastern division."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)					
WR	18	Ja'Cory Thomas (Jr.)	11	TJ Johnson (Jr.)
WR	17	Na'eem Abdul-Rahim Gladding (So.)	2	Tre Brown (So.)
WR	12	Titus Myers (So.)	0	TJ Lott (So.)
LT	**64**	**ZACH BARLEV (SR.)**	76	Josh Schuetzmann (Fr.)
LG	75	Skyler Grant (Sr.)	55	Maarten Woudsma (Jr.)
C	72	Colin Henrich (Sr.)	65	Ryan Joyce (Sr.)
RG	78	Elijah Hoskin (Sr.)	73	Connor Drake (So.)
RT	**58**	**STEPHON DUBOSE-BOURNE (SR.)**	74	Carson Bradley (So.)
TE	9	Jalen Butler (Jr.)	19	Dawson Johnson (Fr.)
QB	**1**	**COLTON JOSEPH (SO.)**	10	Quinn Henicle (Fr.)
RB	3	Devin Roche (So.)	5	Maurki James (Fr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	**43**	**KRIS TRINIDAD (SR.)**	36	Javen Gibson (Jr.)
DT	9	DeAndre Lynch (So.)	99	Cole Daniels (Sr.)
DE	94	Ricardo Williams Jr. (Sr.)	98	Christopher Spencer (Jr.)
LB	**42**	**JASON HENDERSON (SR.)**	**10**	**KOA NAOTALA (JR.)**
LB	**34**	**JAHLEEL CULBREATH (JR.)**	38	Seth Naotala (Sr.)
LB	**0**	**MARIO THOMPSON (JR.)**	1	Keshawn Thomas (Jr.)
CB	8	Botros Alisandro (Sr.)	27	Jordan Saunders (So.)
CB	25	Brandon Crutchfield (So.)	23	Jorian Haynes (So.)
NB	5	Nickendre Stiger (Sr.)	4	Jeremy Mack Jr. (Sr.)
S	**3**	**MARIO EASTERLY (JR.)**	12	Jerome Carter (So.)
S	19	Lucas Struck (So.)	14	Marco Tyson (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	94	Riley Callaghan (Sr.)	KR	3	Devin Roche (So.)
P	96	Ian Brandt (So.)	PR	3	Devin Roche (So.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

COREY RUCKER

SCOTT SEWELL-USA TODAY SPORTS

SCOUTING THE RED WOLVES

"Jaylen Raynor is a special talent and makes that system go. ... There's been a lot of coaches picked off that staff for jobs at bigger places, which is a sign of respect for what they're doing, but it's going to be hard to adjust. They're changing over most of the defensive staff with [Rob] Harley going to Northern Illinois. ... Butch [Jones] rebuilt the program from scratch, and they're back above .500, but they're still not a top-end team in this league. That's the next step for them. Give Butch credit for taking it slow and really leaning in on high school recruiting; for a while there, they were throwing out a lot of their young guys into the fire. Now it's paying off. ... They're recruiting really well, and now they have to put together a big, breakout season."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	7	**COREY RUCKER (SR.)**	4	JJ Harrell (Fr.)
WR	3	Hunter Summers (So.)	0	Nana Burris (Sr.)
WR	16	Chauncy Cobb (So.)	11	Demarcco Blanton (Jr.)
LT	65	**NOAH SMITH (SR.)**	78	Riley McGehee (So.)
LG	68	Tristian Smith (Jr.)	79	Baker North (Fr.)
C	52	Mason Myers (So.)	54	Walker Davis (So.)
RG	53	Wil Saxton (Jr.)	79	Baker North (Fr.)
RT	55	Aleric Watson (Jr.)	71	Chace Stratford (Fr.)
TE	87	Tyler Little (Jr.)	17	Jabari Bush (Fr.)
QB	1	**JAYLEN RAYNOR (JR.)**	8	Josh Flowers (Fr.)
RB	2	**JA'QUEZ CROSS (SR.)**	24	Devin Spencer (So.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	4	**BRYAN WHITEHEAD (SR.)**	12	Marcus Bradley (Sr.)
DT	94	Cody Sigler (Jr.)	98	Alex Martin (Fr.)
DT	97	Simeon Mitchell (Sr.)	47	Lucas Banks (Sr.)
DE	10	Demarcus Hendricks (Sr.)	32	Ethan Hassler (Sr.)
LB		Javante Mackey (Jr.)	20	Kyle Taylor (Sr.)
LB	25	Aaron Alexander (Jr.)	43	Chase Bogle (Fr.)
CB	9	Avante Dickerson (Sr.)	21	Braden Jackson (So.)
CB	0	Trenton Yowe (Sr.)	18	Kyle Williams (Fr.)
S	6	AG McGhee (Sr.)	22	Joedrick Lewis (Sr.)
S	8	Brandon Barnes (So.)	28	Trevon Howard (So.)
S	15	Brandon Greil (Jr.)	14	Demarcus Baker (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	34	Clune Van Andel (Jr.)	KR 16	Chauncy Cobb (So.)
P	40	Jaxson Dunn (Fr.)	PR 2	Ja'Quez Cross (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

ARKANSAS STATE RED WOLVES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 94 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 4 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE While Arkansas State must rebuild its line, the Red Wolves have proven players elsewhere. Junior quarterback Jaylen Raynor led three game-winning drives inside the final two minutes last season, capping the year by accounting for three touchdowns to earn Offensive MVP honors in a 68 Ventures Bowl victory over Bowling Green. Raynor passed for 2,783 yards and 16 touchdowns for the season, completing 61.7% of his attempts, and was also a threat to run with 387 yards and three scores.

Senior running back Ja'Quez Cross accounted for 1,341 all-purpose yards and should lead a three-deep running back group that will also include swift sophomore Devin Spencer and 220-pound Southern Miss transfer Kenyon Clay. Senior wide receiver Corey Rucker, the Red Wolves' career leader in receiving yards (3,037), has a knack for winning one-on-one matchups. Tight end Jabari Bush, a 6-foot-4 redshirt freshman, impressed head coach Butch Jones in the spring.

The task of rebuilding the line became more difficult when three-year starting tackle Makilan Thomas entered the transfer portal in the spring. Senior tackle Noah Smith is the lone returning starter up front.

DEFENSE New coordinator Griff McCarley is the lone defensive staff holdover as Arkansas State goes to a 4-2-5 look.

The two-deep also has plenty of new faces, with senior end Bryan Whitehead considered the only returning starter. Whitehead established himself as one of the league's better edge players last fall, with 15 quarterback hurries, 10.5 tackles for a loss and four sacks.

Transfer portal additions will be key for the Red Wolves. Linebacker Javante Mackey, one of ASU's top tacklers two years ago, is returning from Memphis, and safety AG McGhee, a 13-game starter last year at Marshall, is a leader in the secondary. Sophomore safety Brandon Barnes, who picked off two passes in spring scrimmages, will have a larger role.

SPECIALISTS Junior kicker Clune Van Andel made 21-of-25 field-goal attempts, including a game-winner against South Alabama. The Red Wolves are searching for a punter, and they lost punt return specialist Courtney Jackson, who returned two for TDs last season. Cross, who has 1,129 career kick return yards, is expected to have a featured role.

FINAL ANALYSIS After two rocky years starting his tenure, Jones has led the Red Wolves to back-to-back bowl games. Last year's team was at its best in close games, finishing 7-0 in games decided by seven points or fewer, but the Red Wolves have far less experience this season. How well ASU can fill the gaps, especially on the offensive and defensive lines, will determine whether the Red Wolves can earn a third consecutive bowl bid.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 31	Central Arkansas	W	34-31
Sept. 7	Tulsa	W	28-24
Sept. 14	at Michigan	L	18-28
Sept. 21	at Iowa State	L	7-52
Oct. 5	South Alabama	W	18-16
Oct. 12	at Texas State	L	9-41
Oct. 19	at Southern Miss	W	44-28
Oct. 26	Troy	W	34-31
Nov. 9	at Louisiana	L	19-55
Nov. 16	at Georgia State	W	27-20
Nov. 23	ULM	W	28-21
Nov. 30	Old Dominion	L	32-40
Dec. 26	vs. Bowling Green #	W	38-31

#68 Ventures Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	SE Missouri State
Sept. 6	at Arkansas
Sept. 13	Iowa State
Sept. 20	at Kennesaw State
Sept. 27	at ULM
Oct. 4	Texas State
Oct. 14	at South Alabama
Oct. 25	Georgia Southern
Nov. 1	at Troy
Nov. 8	Southern Miss
Nov. 20	Louisiana
Nov. 29	at Appalachian State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Demarcco Blanton, WR	★★★
2.	Mike Peterson Jr., ATH	★★★
3.	Demarcus Baker, CB	★★★
4.	Shaun Williams, EDGE	★★★
5.	Aidan Wright, EDGE	★★★
6.	Noah Hacker, OT	★★★
7.	Nigel Nelson, LB	★★★
8.	Malekhi Weedon, S	★★★
9.	Ryan Reese, DL	★★★
10.	Andre Feast, WR	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Butch Jones • Record at School: 19-31 (4 years) • Career Record: 103-85 (15 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Keith Heckendorf • Defensive Coordinator: Griff McCarley • Location: Jonesboro, Ark. • Stadium: Centennial Bank Stadium (30,406)

LOUISIANA RAGIN' CAJUNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 92 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 2 | 2024 RECORD: 10-4, 7-1 SBC

OFFENSE The Cajuns faced a void at quarterback left by the graduated Ben Wooldridge, the 2024 Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year. They filled it with a local product, Walker Howard, who returns to his hometown with three seasons under his belt at LSU and Ole Miss. Although he barely saw the field in the SEC, Howard is a former blue-chip recruit who appears to have a clear path to the top of the depth chart for the first time in his career. He split reps in the spring with a couple of holdovers, Daniel Beale and D'Wayne "Lunch" Winfield, who played sparingly as freshmen.

There are familiar faces elsewhere, most notably in the backfield, where leading rushers Zylan Perry and Bill Davis are back after accounting for a combined 1,623 scrimmage yards and 14 touchdowns. The outlook is murkier up front, where Louisiana must replace two first-team all-conference picks on the interior line, and especially at wideout, where five of last year's top six targets have moved on. The only remaining regular from the wide receiver rotation, Robert Williams, is due for an expanded role alongside another once-touted LSU signee, transfer Shelton Sampson Jr.

DEFENSE There are more questions than answers for a unit that lost 10 of last year's top 13 defenders in terms of total snap counts.

Known quantities include the pass rush, led by senior edge rushers Cameron Whitfield and Jordan Lawson, as well as safeties Tyree Skipper and Kody Jackson, who combined for seven interceptions in 2024.

The rest of the depth chart is a work in progress. Both starting corners portaled out to Power 4 schools — Michigan and Louisville — leaving the position to their former understudies. At linebacker, first dibs on replacing departed All-Sun Belt pick K.C. Ossai will fall to senior Jaden Dugger, who moved from an edge role to inside linebacker in the spring, and junior Kailep Edwards, a breakout candidate coming off a redshirt.

SPECIALISTS The Cajuns finally bid adieu to kicker Kenneth Almendares, who connected on a school-record 69 field goals over his seven-year tenure on campus. His likely replacement, Tony Sterner, has connected on just one. Williams and Perry split kickoff return duties in '24, with Williams taking one the distance in a win over Troy.

FINAL ANALYSIS Louisiana was a pleasant surprise in 2024, turning in a 10-2 regular season and booking a slot in the Sun Belt Championship Game. Still, postseason blowouts at the hands of Marshall and TCU left a sour taste. This is still an outfit that can compete for a conference title in any given season under fourth-year head coach Michael Desormeaux, but earning another shot at in '25 will require even more variables to fall into place — beginning with the big one behind center.

JORDAN LAWSON

SCOUTING THE CAJUNS

"Last year was the breakthrough Michael [Desormeaux] really needed. Taking over after [Billy] Napier, he got a lot of the benefit of the doubt, being a native and all, but they made good on it. ... This is one of the best programs in the league at recruiting aggressively and taking advantage of their geography. Walker Howard is a great pickup for them, making the change at quarterback and grabbing the local guy from the SEC. I think he can win that starting job easily. That kid lost out to some elite-level talent at LSU and Ole Miss and wants to establish himself. He's hungry. ... They've got the benefit of consistency in the system and staff, and that goes a long way at this level. I think they've got a great chance to repeat winning the Western division."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)					
WR	0	Robert Williams (Sr.)	8	Rahji Dennis (So.)
WR	6	Shelton Sampson Jr. (So.)	87	KeDarius Wade (So.)
WR	18	Jaydon Johnson (Jr.)	19	Dale Martin (Sr.)
LT	64	Bryant Williams (Jr.)	57	Zay Alexander (Fr.)
LG	79	Mackey Maillho (Sr.)	76	Matthew Broussard (So.)
C	**70**	**JAX HARRINGTON (SR.)**	50	Cooper Fordham (So.)
RG	75	Kaden Moreau (Jr.)	67	John Bragg (So.)
RT	**71**	**GEORGE JACKSON (SR.)**	57	Zay Alexander (Fr.)
TE	**88**	**CADEN JENSEN (SO.)**	83	Brock Chappell (Jr.)
QB	4	Walker Howard (Jr.)	11	Daniel Beale (Fr.)
RB	3	**ZYLAN PERRY (JR.)**	7	Bill Davis (So.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	**0**	**JORDAN LAWSON (SR.)**	17	Ashley Williams (So.)
DT	**90**	**KADARIUS MILLER (SR.)**	99	Ashton Wright (Fr.)
DT	68	Fitzgerald West Jr. (Jr.)	41	Chase Edwards (So.)
JACK	**9**	**CAMERON WHITFIELD (SR.)**	31	Trey Fite (Jr.)
ILB	3	Jaden Dugger (Sr.)	6	Terrence Williams (Sr.)
ILB	16	Kailep Edwards (Jr.)	45	Caleb Kibodi (Sr.)
CB	24	Lorenzell Dubose (Jr.)	23	Jeremiah Moses (So.)
CB	13	Curley Reed III (So.)	10	Avery Demery (Fr.)
STAR	8	Kody Jackson (So.)	21	Maurion Eleam (Jr.)
S	4	Tyree Skipper (Sr.)	27	Key'Savalyn Barnes (Sr.)
S	2	Jalen Clark (Sr.)	27	Key'Savalyn Barnes (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	95	Tony Sterner (Jr.)	KR	0	Robert Williams (Sr.)
P	92	Nathan Torney (Sr.)	PR	3	Zylan Perry (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

2024 RESULTS (10-4, 7-1 SBC)

Aug. 31	Grambling State	W	40-10
Sept. 7	at Kennesaw State	W	34-10
Sept. 21	Tulane	L	33-41
Sept. 28	at Wake Forest	W	41-38
Oct. 5	at Southern Miss	W	23-13
Oct. 12	Appalachian State	W	34-24
Oct. 19	at Coastal Carolina	W	34-24
Oct. 29	at Texas State	W	23-17
Nov. 9	Arkansas State	W	55-19
Nov. 16	South Alabama	L	22-24
Nov. 23	Troy	W	51-30
Nov. 30	at ULM	W	37-23
Dec. 7	Marshall #	L	3-31
Dec. 28	vs. TCU %	L	3-34

#SBC Championship %New Mexico Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Rice
Sept. 6	McNeese
Sept. 13	at Missouri
Sept. 20	at Eastern Michigan
Sept. 27	Marshall
Oct. 11	at James Madison
Oct. 18	Southern Miss
Oct. 25	at Troy
Nov. 1	at South Alabama
Nov. 8	Texas State
Nov. 20	at Arkansas State
Nov. 29	ULM

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Korbin Ashmore, DL	★★★
2.	Brent Gordon Jr., S	★★★
3.	Jayden Gloston, CB	★★★
4.	JJ Garner, RB	★★★
5.	Russell Babineaux, WR	★★★
6.	Evan Stroman, WR	★★★
7.	Cam Riley, CB	★★★
8.	AJ Spencer, EDGE	★★★
9.	Steven Ranel II, S	★★★
10.	Baylynn Williams, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Michael Desormeaux • Record at School: 23-18 (3+ years)
Career Record: 23-18 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Leger
Defensive Coordinator: Jim Salgado • Location: Lafayette, La.
Stadium: Cajun Stadium (20,000)

SCOTT CLAUSE/USA TODAY NETWORK

KENTREL BULLOCK

MICKEY WELSH / ADVERTISER

SCOUTING THE JAGUARS

"As long as they don't get wrecked by the portal, they've got a pretty solid core in place for this season. They need to get some receivers in there because a bunch of those guys left, but it's a solid offense. They lost [offensive coordinator Rob] Ezell to Wake Forest, but they're promoting Paul [Petrino], so don't expect any drastic changes. ... They had a dynamic guy in Fluff Bothwell [transferred to Mississippi State], but they have a lot of other backs on the roster. None of them look like him, but they do a really good job with roster management, and it's a good culture. They had a solid transition year when Major came in, and they could up their win total this season if they can keep the roster intact."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	**DEVIN VOISIN (SR.)**	6	Micah Woods (Sr.)
WR	12	Brendan Jenkins (Jr.)	9	Jeremy Scott (Fr.)
WR	11	Anthony Eager (So.)	18	Keyshawn Woodyard (Sr.)
LT	73	Daniel Foster-Allen (Sr.)	54	Leavy Johnson (So.)
LG	69	**KENTON JERIDO (JR.)**	70	Asher Hale (So.)
C	55	**MALACHI PRECIADO (JR.)**	56	Adrian Griffin (So.)
RG	57	Amaury Wiggins (Sr.)	62	Ni Mansell (Jr.)
RT	72	Ethan Hubbard (So.)	74	Reid Gavin (Sr.)
TE	13	Miller McCrumby (Sr.)	82	Trent Thomas (So.)
QB	4	Bishop Davenport (Jr.)		Zach Pyron (Fr.)
RB	3	**KENTREL BULLOCK (SR.)**	22	PJ Martin (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	97	Tyler Thomas (So.)	41	Tyler Carter (Fr.)
NT	45	Ed Smith IV (Sr.)	92	Dominic Wiseman (Jr.)
DT	18	RJ Moss Jr. (So.)	91	Nathan Jennings (Fr.)
EDGE	21	Tre'Mon Henry (So.)	39	Tirrell Johnson (Jr.)
LB	32	**BLAYNE MYRICK (JR.)**	11	Dalton Hughes (Sr.)
LB	28	**DARIUS MCKENZIE (SR.)**	40	Caleb Dozier (Fr.)
CB	2	Jayvon Henderson (Jr.)	22	Ty Goodwill (So.)
CB	24	Damyrion Darby (So.)	16	Brian Dillard (Sr.)
NB	17	Dallas Young (So.)	0	Christopher Wallace Jr. (Sr.)
S	12	Anthony Brown (Jr.)	3	Tywon Wray Jr. (So.)
S	6	**WESLEY MILLER (JR.)**	31	Mike Harris (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Davis Little (Fr.)	KR	1 Devin Voisin (Sr.)
P	40	Aleksi Pulkkinen (Jr.)	PR	12 Brendan Jenkins (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

SOUTH ALABAMA JAGUARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 93 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 3 | 2024 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE South Alabama was in the top 20 nationally in total offense and scoring offense in head coach Major Applewhite's first season, but repeating that feat could be tough after quarterback Gio Lopez transferred to North Carolina in the spring. Bishop Davenport (604 passing yards, three TDs, 161 rushing yards, one TD) and transfer Zach Pyron are solid replacements, though. Davenport filled in for an injured Lopez in USA's bowl win, accounting for 356 yards of total offense. Pyron started a few games at Georgia Tech before transferring to Minnesota in the winter.

Seventh-year senior Devin Voisin was one of the league's best receivers in 2022, but he's been slowed by injuries the past two seasons. Now healthy, Voisin could be a top target if he returns to his old form. But there's as much excitement over speedy sophomore Anthony Eager.

The Jaguars lost all-conference running back Fluff Bothwell to Mississippi State. But Kentrel Bullock was just as productive (832 rushing yards, seven TDs), so he'll take a larger role in the backfield.

The offensive line has been rebuilt after multiple starters jumped into the portal. Arkansas transfer Amaury Wiggins is a key addition.

DEFENSE South Alabama likes versatile athletes who can play in space on defense, and it has plenty. Linebackers Blayne Myrick (101 tackles, eight tackles for a loss) and Darius McKenzie (72 tackles, 3.5 TFLs) make up one of the Sun Belt's best linebacker duos.

Safety Wesley Miller (59 tackles, 3 INTs) should be a stabilizing force in the secondary, which made 16 interceptions last season. But there were still defensive back losses to the portal in the spring.

There are concerns up front, where three defensive linemen graduated and another transferred. But 306-pound Ed Smith IV (3.5 TFLs, 2 sacks) at least provides girth to the run defense.

SPECIALISTS Davis Little and Hamilton DiBoyan are competing to replace All-Sun Belt placekicker Laith Marjan, who transferred to Kansas. Aleksi Pulkkinen averaged a solid 40.4 yards per punt.

The return roles could be up for grabs. But Voisin is certainly capable, and FCS Samford transfer Brendan Jenkins will get an opportunity.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's a given that an Applewhite-coached team will be strong on offense. But the Jags' recipe for winning involves a stout run defense, and that's in question as the defensive front rebuilds. South Alabama could dip a bit or contend for the Sun Belt title. There's a fine line, especially after the Jags lost four games by seven points or fewer. Count on them getting to another bowl, but they likely won't be in the league title race unless they get strong play from a new quarterback.

2024 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 31	North Texas	L	38-52
Sept. 7	at Ohio	L	20-27
Sept. 12	Northwestern State	W	87-10
Sept. 19	at Appalachian State	W	48-14
Sept. 28	at LSU	L	10-42
Oct. 5	at Arkansas State	L	16-18
Oct. 15	Troy	W	25-9
Oct. 26	ULM	W	46-17
Nov. 2	Georgia Southern	L	30-34
Nov. 16	at Louisiana	W	24-22
Nov. 23	at Southern Miss	W	35-14
Nov. 29	Texas State	L	38-45
Dec. 14	vs. West. Michigan #	W	30-23

#Salute to Veterans Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Morgan State
Sept. 6	Tulane
Sept. 13	at Auburn
Sept. 20	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 27	at North Texas
Oct. 4	at Troy
Oct. 14	Arkansas State
Oct. 23	at Georgia State
Nov. 1	Louisiana
Nov. 15	at ULM
Nov. 22	Southern Miss
Nov. 29	at Texas State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brec Long, TE	★★★
2.	Julyon Jordan, RB	★★★
3.	Keeson Wheeler, ATH	★★★
4.	Lorenzo Smith, S	★★★
5.	Kohl Bradley, S	★★★
6.	Maddox Lynch, TE	★★★
7.	Trae Stevenson, WR	★★★
8.	E'Mauri Smiley, EDGE	★★★
9.	Kearius Bivens, OT	★★★
10.	Devin White, IOL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Major Applewhite • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year) • Career Record: 22-17 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Paul Petrino
Defensive Coordinator: Will Windham • Location: Mobile, Ala.
Stadium: Hancock Whitney Stadium (25,450)

SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 96 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 5 | 2024 RECORD: 1-11, 0-8 SBC

OFFENSE Southern Miss is primed for a turnaround with the arrival of head coach Charles Huff, who led Marshall to a Sun Belt title last season. But that's just the start of the good vibes. Huff hired former Utah State/Arkansas State head coach Blake Anderson as his offensive coordinator. And Huff brought several key players with him from Marshall.

The most important addition is former Marshall quarterback Braylon Braxton, the 2024 Sun Belt Newcomer of the Year and Sun Belt title game MVP. He passed for 1,624 yards and 19 touchdowns and rushed for 610 yards and four scores in 2024. Braxton has ample targets. Five of Marshall's top seven receivers transferred in, led by Chuck Montgomery (393 yards) and Carl Chester (342 yards).

There's a similar battle at running back, where Ole Miss transfer Matt Jones and Mississippi State transfer Jeffery Pittman are among the contenders. Several transfers will compete along the offensive line.

DEFENSE More than half the starters on defense could be Marshall transfers. Cornerback Josh Moten tied for the Sun Belt lead with five interceptions, and safety Ahmere Foster was a two-year starter. On the defensive line, edge rusher Jabari Ishmael and tackle Isaiah Gibson Sr. should provide an immediate impact.

But Marshall transfers aren't the only ones who will impact the depth chart throughout. Portland State transfer linebacker Michael Montgomery, an FCS Freshman All-American, rounds out the newcomers.

There are a few notable Southern Miss veterans. Defensive tackle Brodarius Lewis led the team with eight tackles for a loss and four sacks. Linebacker Chris Jones is the team's top returning tackler with 46.

SPECIALISTS At least two Marshall transfers will drastically upgrade special teams. Ian Foster is the Sun Belt's best kickoff returner, averaging 32.4 yards per return. Elijah Metcalf averaged 9.2 yards per punt return. Placekicker Kaden Morgan was the only player at his position on the roster in spring, and Southern Miss will have to find a punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS Can a head coach and roster transfer their success from one program to another? This Southern Miss team will stage that experiment. It's a tall order for Huff as he goes from the Sun Belt's best team (10-3) to its worst (1-11). But he guided Marshall to a 32-20 record in four seasons, including signature wins over Notre Dame and Virginia Tech. Huff added about 40 transfers, at least half from Marshall. But it could take time to fit the pieces together. Expect Southern Miss to make big strides, but repeating Marshall's success may be too much to ask in a single season.

2024 RESULTS (1-11, 0-8 SBC)

Aug. 31	at Kentucky	L	0-31
Sept. 7	SE Louisiana	W	35-10
Sept. 14	South Florida	L	24-49
Sept. 21	at Jacksonville State	L	7-44
Oct. 5	Louisiana	L	13-23
Oct. 12	at ULM	L	21-38
Oct. 19	Arkansas State	L	28-44
Oct. 26	at James Madison	L	15-32
Nov. 9	Marshall	L	3-37
Nov. 16	at Texas State	L	3-58
Nov. 23	South Alabama	L	14-35
Nov. 30	at Troy	L	20-52

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Mississippi State
Sept. 6	Jackson State
Sept. 13	Appalachian State
Sept. 20	at Louisiana Tech
Sept. 27	Jacksonville State
Oct. 9	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 18	at Louisiana
Oct. 25	ULM
Nov. 8	at Arkansas State
Nov. 15	Texas State
Nov. 22	at South Alabama
Nov. 29	Troy

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zach Ruffin, S	★★★
2.	Jermane Hayes, ATH	★★★
3.	Trevionn Morton, S	★★★
4.	Malachi Henderson, LB	★★★
5.	Denzel Gardner, QB	★★★
6.	Mi-Quane Williams, IOL	★★★
7.	Dylan King, S	★★★
8.	Shane King, TE	★★★
9.	Silas Corder, QB	★★★
10.	Jaylin Carter, WR	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charles Huff • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 32-30 (4 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Blake Anderson • Defensive Coordinator: Jason Semore • Location: Hattiesburg, Miss. • Stadium: M.M. Roberts Stadium (36,000)

CHRIS JONES

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"How fast can [Charles] Huff get it going here? They're a better team automatically with this staff and the amount of Herd guys they brought in. They might start more Marshall players from last year on defense than Marshall will. ... Bringing [quarterback Braylon] Braxton in was a huge get. ... They're probably going to work the portal pretty aggressively this summer; don't be surprised if there's some new names there by September. Huff wants to get it going fast. There's going to be a real competition between these guys and Marshall for a little while, and USM's struggled for a long time. There's a lot of pride in that program, but they've struggled to support the new reality of the sport. They're the most interesting team in the league this season."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	6	Micah Davis (Sr.)	13	Page Grant (Jr.)
WR	3	Chuck Montgomery (Sr.)	7	Carl Chester (Sr.)
WR	9	Elijah Metcalf (Sr.)	8	Bralon Brown (Sr.)
LT	75	Hayes Creel (Jr.)	71	Aaryn Parks (Sr.)
LG	78	Jez Janvier (Sr.)	74	Luke Rogers (So.)
C	52	Cooper Frazier (Sr.)	67	Broderick Roman (Sr.)
RG	62	Aloali'i Maui (Sr.)	76	Larry Edwards (So.)
RT	**56**	**GREG NUNNERY (SR.)**	70	Christian Anderson (Jr.)
TE	88	Kyirin Heath (Sr.)	85	Reed Jesiolowski (So.)
QB	0	Braylon Braxton (Sr.)	12	John White (So.)
RB	15	Matt Jones (Sr.)	21	Jeffery Pittman (Jr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	37	Eric Thomas Jr. (Sr.)	15	Jabari Ishmael (Sr.)
NT	**36**	**BRODARIUS LEWIS (SR.)**		Mason Clinton (So.)
DT	7	Isaiah Gibson Sr. (Sr.)	59	Chris Hayes (So.)
DE	16	Jameer Lewis (Sr.)	15	Jabari Ishmael (Sr.)
LB	35	Chris Jones (So.)	53	Joseph Harper (Sr.)
LB	17	Michael Montgomery (Jr.)	13	Mathis Haygood (So.)
CB	0	Brendan Toles (Sr.)	20	Cameron Knox (Jr.)
CB	1	Josh Moten (Sr.)	8	Ishmael Ibraheem (Jr.)
NB	3	Ian Foster (So.)	12	Guylijah Theodule (So.)
S	41	Ahmere Foster (Jr.)	6	Dylan King (Jr.)
S	24	Josh Battle (Sr.)	18	MaLik Caswell (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Kaden Morgan (Jr.)	KR	3 Ian Foster (So.)
P		TBD	PR	9 Elijah Metcalf (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

DAVE HYATT / SPECIAL TO THE GADSDEN TIMES

LINCOLN PARE

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"They've got that dynamic, fast offense, and they can really scare you, but you can really knock them back on their heels on defense. Two years in the league, they've got a pretty recognizable identity. I don't think they can win a conference title without making significant defensive adjustments from what they did at Incarnate Word. They were a lot better last season than [GJ] Kinne's first by switching out the DC. ... They're gonna be wearing nametags for a while because a ton of guys left and a ton came in. ... The offensive system translates really quickly for new personnel, which is an advantage for them. Losing their OC won't really show up on the field. They promoted from within for consistency. I don't think they'll look any different."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)				
WR	1	Chris Dawn Jr. (Jr.)	14	Jordan Martin (Fr.)
WR	11	Beau Sparks (Jr.)		Drew Edwards (Sr.)
WR	17	Kylen Evans (So.)		Skylar Lewis (Fr.)
LT	**64**	**DORION STRAWN (SR.)**		Alan Grimme (Jr.)
LG	65	Emeka Obigbo (Sr.)	51	Brock Riker (Fr.)
C	58	Ezra Dotson-Oyetade (Jr.)	66	Justin DeLeon (So.)
RG	**74**	**TELLEK LOCKETTE (SR.)**		Cameron Schultz (Jr.)
RT		Lysander Moeolo (Sr.)	68	Sully Burns (So.)
TE	16	Blake Smith (Jr.)		Ty Stamey (So.)
QB	8	Brad Jackson (Fr.)		Keldric Luster (So.)
RB	7	Lincoln Pare (Sr.)	5	Jaylen Jenkins (Jr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	6	Jo'Laison Landry (So.)	34	Jermy Jackson Jr. (Fr.)
DT	99	Kamren Washington (Jr.)		Jordan Sanders (Jr.)
DT		Devarrick Woods (Jr.)		Charlie Leota (Sr.)
BAN	22	Kalil Alexander (Sr.)		Kenard Snyder (Sr.)
MLB	29	Treylin Payne (Sr.)		TJ Burkhalter (Fr.)
WLB	26	Michael Boudoin III (Sr.)	44	Karson Kaiser (Jr.)
CB	24	Trez Moore (Sr.)	21	Canden Grogan (Sr.)
CB		Khamari Terrell (Jr.)	23	Amarion Atwood (So.)
NB		Chase Davis (So.)	31	Kameron Pearson (Sr.)
SS	5	Darius Jackson (Jr.)	27	Bobby Crosby (Sr.)
FS	**32**	**RYAN NOLAN (JR.)**	35	Will Mitchell (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		TBD	KR 1	Chris Dawn Jr. (Jr.)
P	38	David Nunez (Sr.)	PR 11	Beau Sparks (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

TIM HEITMAN-IMAGN IMAGES

TEXAS STATE BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 90 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 1 | 2024 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 SBC

OFFENSE The Bobcats led the Sun Belt in scoring and total offense in 2023 and 2024, the first two seasons with head coach G.J. Kinne at the helm in San Marcos. The major difference for Kinne in 2025 is that he will have a new play-caller following offensive coordinator Mack Leftwich's departure to Texas Tech. On top of that, nine of Texas State's 11 offensive starters either graduated or transferred, including leading rusher Ismail Mahdi (Arizona), leading receiver Joey Hobert (graduated), quarterback Jordan McCloud (graduated) and right tackle Alex Harkey (Oregon).

McCloud's replacement behind center is far from settled after spring practice, with returning redshirt freshman Brad Jackson taking on three transfers for the job — Keldric Luster (SMU), Nate Yarnell (Pitt) and Holden Geriner (Auburn). Jackson is the front-runner after accounting for five touchdowns (four rushing, one passing) in three games as a true freshman in 2024.

DEFENSE After losing key contributors to the transfer portal — such as defensive end Ben Bell (Virginia Tech), corner Joshua Eaton (Michigan State) and defensive tackles Tavian Coleman (Colorado) and Terry Webb (SMU) — the Bobcats' defense will run the same 4-2-5 scheme but with new names manning the stations.

The good news is that two of Texas State's top three sacks and tackles-for-a-loss leaders are returning in Kalil Alexander (6.5 sacks, 11 TFLs) and Jo'Laison Landry (4.5 sacks, 7.5 TFLs). For a defense that is replacing four of five starters in the defensive backfield, a stout pass rush for the Bobcats is a must in 2025.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Mason Shipley, an All-Sun Belt selection the past two seasons and Lou Groza Award semifinalist after going 15-of-15 on field-goal attempts in 2023, announced he was transferring right before spring practice. Shipley set a handful of school records in his three seasons, including the longest field goal — a Sun Belt-record 60-yarder. First-year special teams coach Tanner Burns has a big void to fill. Luckily for him, he'll have a solid punt returner in Beau Sparks, who returned four punts for 202 yards (50.5 yards per return) and a touchdown in relief of usual returner Kole Wilson, who transferred to Baylor.

FINAL ANALYSIS Attrition hit the Bobcats hard, especially via the transfer portal. Close to 20 players who made appearances in 2024 transferred out, while another 22 seniors graduated. Kinne is 16-10 with a pair of First Responder Bowl wins in his first two seasons at Texas State, but he will be without a cavalcade of players who were paramount to the team's success in that time.

2024 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 SBC)

Aug. 31	Lamar	W	34-27
Sept. 7	UTSA	W	49-10
Sept. 12	Arizona State	L	28-31
Sept. 28	at Sam Houston	L	39-40
Oct. 3	at Troy	W	38-17
Oct. 12	Arkansas State	W	41-9
Oct. 19	at Old Dominion	L	14-24
Oct. 29	Louisiana	L	17-23
Nov. 9	at ULM	W	38-17
Nov. 16	Southern Miss	W	58-3
Nov. 23	Georgia State	L	44-52
Nov. 29	at South Alabama	W	45-38
Jan. 3	vs. North Texas #	W	30-28

#First Responder Bowl

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 6	at UTSA
Sept. 13	at Arizona State
Sept. 20	Nicholls
Oct. 4	at Arkansas State
Oct. 11	Troy
Oct. 18	at Marshall
Oct. 28	James Madison
Nov. 8	at Louisiana
Nov. 15	at Southern Miss
Nov. 22	ULM
Nov. 29	South Alabama

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	TJ Burkhalter, LB	★★★
2.	Javarius Bell, DL	★★★
3.	Cole Pryor, RB	★★★
4.	Devarrick Woods, SL	★★★
5.	D'Ante Keys, EDGE	★★★
6.	Greg Gipson, CB	★★★
7.	Simeon Garner, EDGE	★★★
8.	Skylar Lewis, WR	★★★
9.	Cordarian Powell, CB	★★★
10.	Kirk Gildon, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: GJ Kinne • Record at School: 16-10 (2 years)
Career Record: 28-12 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Landon Keopple
Defensive Coordinator: Dexter McCoil Sr. • Location: San Marcos, Texas
Stadium: UFCU Stadium (28,000)

TROY TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 100 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 6 | 2024 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE Starting quarterback Will "Goose" Crowder called it a season last September after suffering two concussions in his first four games. His understudy, Matthew Caldwell, went the rest of the way, but Caldwell transferred in the spring. If Crowder is the presumptive front-runner to reclaim the job following a healthy spring, head coach Gerad Parker is in no hurry to confirm it.

The skill positions took a severe hit with the departures of a 1,000-yard rusher (Damien Taylor) and 1,000-yard receiver (Devonte Ross) via the portal. Together, they accounted for nearly 50% of the team's total yards from scrimmage. The most productive holdover, senior WR Peyton Higgins, accounted for 6.7%.

At least the offensive line is more familiar, if only because injuries forced the Trojans to assemble a new starting five on a near-weekly basis. The only lineman to go the distance at the same position, sophomore left tackle Elijah Prather, has the makings of a long-term fixture.

DEFENSE First-year coordinator Dontae Wright had the unenviable task in 2024 of replacing virtually the entire starting lineup from a unit that finished in the top 10 nationally in scoring defense in both 2022 (8th) and '23 (10th). It went about as well as you'd expect: Troy plunged to 93rd in scoring defense. The upshot is a group that's significantly more seasoned in '25. Nine of last year's top 14 defenders in terms of snap counts are back, including the entire interior D-line rotation that helped the Trojans rank No. 1 against the run in Sun Belt play.

Among Wright's top priorities in Year 2: More pressure and, relatedly, more takeaways. Troy declined markedly in both categories, generating 19 sacks and nine turnovers. Six new edge rushers joined the roster in the offseason, all of whom have a chance to contribute right away.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Scott Taylor Renfroe has been solid over the past two seasons, connecting on 30-of-37 field goal attempts, including a near-automatic 24-of-25 from inside 40 yards. Ross' transfer to Penn State was a blow to the return game; he's the only Troy player to score a touchdown in either column in the past five years.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's been a boom-or-bust decade for a program that has balanced five 10-win seasons with five losing seasons since 2015. Last year's 4-8 finish was a bust, albeit a predictable one following a mass exodus from both the roster and the coaching staff. (Losing the starting quarterback one snap into the start of conference play didn't help, either.) The talent level is not what it was two years ago, but expectations have not dipped nearly enough to accept "rebuilding" as the new normal.

2024 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 31	Nevada	L	26-28
Sept. 7	at Memphis	L	17-38
Sept. 14	at Iowa	L	21-38
Sept. 21	Florida A&M	W	34-12
Sept. 28	ULM	L	9-13
Oct. 3	Texas State	L	17-38
Oct. 15	at South Alabama	L	9-25
Oct. 26	at Arkansas State	L	31-34
Nov. 2	Coastal Carolina	W	38-24
Nov. 16	at Georgia Southern	W	28-20
Nov. 23	at Louisiana	L	30-51
Nov. 30	Southern Miss	W	52-20

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Nicholls
Sept. 6	at Clemson
Sept. 13	Memphis
Sept. 20	at Buffalo
Oct. 4	South Alabama
Oct. 11	at Texas State
Oct. 18	at ULM
Oct. 25	Louisiana
Nov. 1	Arkansas State
Nov. 13	at Old Dominion
Nov. 22	Georgia State
Nov. 29	at Southern Miss

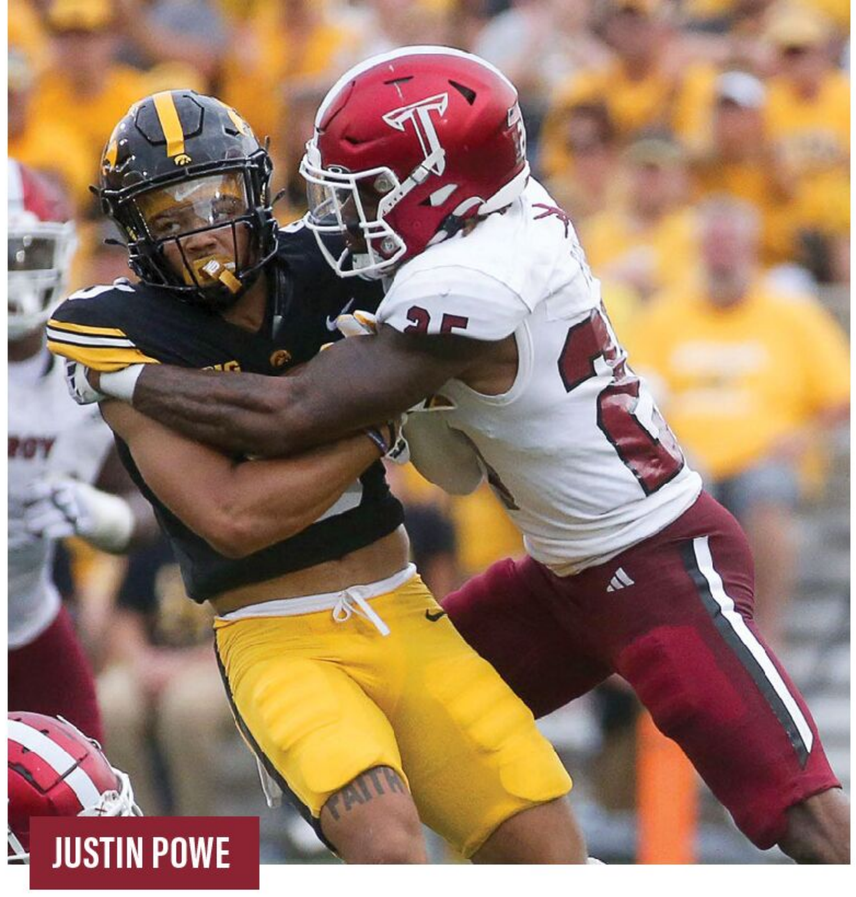
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dariyonne Bryant, WR	★★★
2.	Donnie Smith, LB	★★★
3.	Makel Green, EDGE	★★★
4.	Antonious Steele, S	★★★
5.	AC Walters, RB	★★★
6.	LaDarius Jemes, EDGE	★★★
7.	RJ Shamberger, DL	★★★
8.	Jah'Marren Jackson, WR	★★★
9.	JT Alvis, S	★★★
10.	Paul Bowling, IOL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Gerad Parker • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-14 (1+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Sean Reagan • Defensive Coordinator: Dontae Wright • Location: Troy, Ala. • Stadium: Veterans Memorial Stadium (30,470)



JUSTIN POWE

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"They're committing to the rebuild process and not trying to portal in an entire roster. They've been really successful recruiting high schools, and they're pitching playing time because they threw a lot of young guys out there last season. They were probably the youngest team in our league last year. ... A good comparison is how Butch [Jones] rebuilt Arkansas State. That means it will take time, and you won't be at that 11-win level like in 2023 for a while, but the upside is that you should get more consistency along the way. They're not ready yet, but keep an eye out for them as a sleeper. They finished 3-1 when no one else was watching after they lost a bunch to open the year, and they haven't really lost a bunch of guys. That's a good recipe to shock folks."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	2	**PEYTON HIGGINS (SR.)**	8	Tray Taylor (Sr.)
WR	0	Roman Mothershed (Jr.)	19	Jywon Boyd (Fr.)
WR	5	Mojo Dortch (Jr.)	7	Kristian Tate (So.)
LT	58	**ELIJAH PRATHER (SO.)**	72	Patrick Screws Jr. (So.)
LG	75	Zerian Hudson (Sr.)	73	Tyler Bell (So.)
C	66	**ELI RUSS (SR.)**	65	Tyler Cappi (Jr.)
RG	67	**MATT HENRY (SR.)**	52	Vysen Lang (So.)
RT	77	Garner Langlo (Sr.)	71	Kyler Gibson (Jr.)
TE	14	Ethan Conner (Sr.)	89	Trae Swartz (Sr.)
QB	9	Goose Crowder (Jr.)	10	Tucker Kilcrease (Jr.)
RB	1	Jordan Lovett (So.)		Trey Cooley (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	53	Jabril McNeill (Sr.)	19	Elijah Davis (Sr.)
NT	93	Kam Curry (Sr.)	98	Jamel Fils-Aime (Sr.)
DT	95	**LUIS MEDINA (SR.)**	99	**JULIAN PETERSON (SR.)**
BAN	0	Jah-Mal Williams (Sr.)	8	Eric Shaw (Jr.)
MLB	2	Steven Cattledge (Sr.)	44	Luke Hodge (Jr.)
WLB	7	**JORDAN STRINGER (SR.)**	4	TJ Thompson (Jr.)
SPEAR	3	**DEVIN LAFAYETTE (SR.)**	18	Jordan Perry (Jr.)
CB	12	Trent Henry (Sr.)	31	Shemar Welch (Fr.)
CB	6	Kaleno Levine (Sr.)	26	Dorion Jackson (So.)
SS	6	**JUSTIN POWE (JR.)**	24	Rondell Carter (So.)
FS	14	David Daniel-Sisavanh (Sr.)	29	Joe Lott (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Scott Taylor Renfroe (Sr.)	KR	1	Jordan Lovett (So.)
P	28	Evan Crenshaw (Jr.)	PR	2	Peyton Higgins (Sr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JULIA HANSEN/IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN

JAKE GODFREY

SCOUTING THE WARHAWKS

"Definitely the biggest culture change in our league last year, and maybe all of college football. This job didn't get any easier, but [Bryant] Vincent just works his butt off. They're grinders. They're really connected in recruiting, and they've kept a few of their good players from jumping into the portal after they showed out last season. That's maybe the most impressive thing they've done so far. ... They should be able to break through to a winning season this year if that offense can improve. Apparently, Vincent isn't calling the plays this year. He's a play-caller, so giving that up might be hard, but ULM is a place where you've got to wear a lot of hats to be any kind of successful. If Vincent and that staff can get that program over .500, they're going to be in demand."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	12	Javon Campbell (Sr.)	1	Amir McGruder (Jr.)
WR	0	Tyler Griffin (Sr.)	83	Jonathan Bibbs (Fr.)
WR	2	Jake Godfrey (Jr.)		Nic Trujillo (So.)
LT	**60**	**SAM CARSON (SR.)**	62	Adameon Botley (Jr.)
LG	**58**	**ELIJAH FISHER (SR.)**	77	Reese Steele (Sr.)
C	64	Drew Hutchinson (Jr.)		Antavious Woody (Jr.)
RG	**56**	**JAY MICKLE (SR.)**	51	Jaden Rowe (Fr.)
RT	75	Que McBroom (Sr.)	59	Quentis Griffin Jr. (Jr.)
TE	**80**	**NATE SULLIVAN JR. (SR.)**	85	Rylan Green (Sr.)
QB	**10**	**AIDAN ARMENTA (SO.)**	17	Hunter Herring (Sr.)
RB		Zach Palmer-Smith (Sr.)		Antonio Martin Jr. (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**18**	**KEVONTAY WELLS (SR.)**	92	James Smith (Jr.)
NT	90	Jaden Hamlin (Sr.)	91	Amarion Ware (Jr.)
DT	41	Dylan Howell (Sr.)	28	Davin Anderson (Sr.)
BAN	**5**	**BILLY PULLEN (SR.)**	0	Tristan Shorter (Sr.)
MLB	**6**	**TYRESE HOPKINS (SR.)**	7	Daniel Knudsen (Sr.)
ROV	16	Seidrion Langston (Jr.)	10	Kelbee Holmes (Sr.)
SPUR	27	Stephen Saywahn (Sr.)	38	Markeegan Gray (Sr.)
CB	**13**	**DAVID GODSEY JR. (SR.)**	20	Jyren Ester (Sr.)
CB		D'Arco Perkins-McAllister (Sr.)	2	Korian Wilson (Jr.)
S	21	Lynard Harris (So.)	9	Andre Mack (Sr.)
S	**8**	**CARL FAUNTROY (SR.)**	15	Kristopher Robinson (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Max Larson (Sr.)	KR	2 Jake Godfrey (Jr.)
P	47	Makenzie Ryan (So.)	PR	2 Jake Godfrey (Jr.)

RETURNING STARTERS IN **BOLD**

JOHN REED-IMAGN IMAGES

ULM WARHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 116 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 7 | 2024 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 SBC

OFFENSE ULM established an offensive identity in head coach Bryant Vincent's first season as Ahmad Hardy led the Sun Belt in rushing, but Hardy transferred to Missouri. So the challenge is to find another bell-cow running back. The Warhawks added two FCS standouts in Richmond transfer Zach Palmer-Smith (1,442 total yards, 14 TDs) and Southeastern Louisiana transfer Antonio Martin Jr. (1,302 total yards, 11 TDs).

The second challenge is to boost the air attack after ranking No. 128 in passing offense. Quarterback Aidan Armenta (1,292 yards passing, nine TDs, 10 INTs) is back. But he must cut down his interceptions and stretch the field after failing to post a 200-yard passing game.

Three-year starting guard Elijah Fisher anchors the offensive line. Jake Godfrey (24 rec., 265 yards) paces the receiving corps, but talented tight ends could be a factor.

DEFENSE ULM's defense had the opposite imbalance. It struggled against the run but led the Sun Belt in passing defense. There are reasons to believe it can be closer to a complete defense in 2025.

David Godsey Jr. is a two-year starter at cornerback. And FCS Chattanooga transfer D'Arco Perkins-McAllister, who started his career at TCU, is a key addition at the other cornerback spot to solidify an already talented secondary. Losing star safety Wydett Williams Jr. to Ole Miss in the spring transfer portal was quite a blow. But that means role players like Lynard Harris must fill those shoes.

Defensive lineman Kevontay Wells (team-leading 11 tackles for a loss) and edge rusher Billy Pullen (team-leading six sacks) return after earning All-Sun Belt honors. They should provide teeth to the front, especially with the pass rush. The question is whether ULM can improve on its weak rushing defense, which allowed 200.1 yards per game last season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Max Larson is close to a sure thing. He made 14-of-17 field goals last season, but he outright missed only one kick because two were blocked. Makenzie Ryan averaged 39.2 yards per punt. ULM had the conference's worst kick return team, averaging only 15.1 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Vincent reportedly turned down the Jacksonville State job. It demonstrates that he believes ULM can turn the corner and post its first winning record since 2012. Vincent got close last season. The Warhawks started 5-1 but lost six straight to finish.

ULM had less roster turnover than many Group of 5 programs, so there's hope of stability. And it was the least penalized team in the Sun Belt (43.3 ypg), indicating discipline. But blowout losses to some top-tier Sun Belt teams revealed a sizable gap that ULM must close.

2024 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 SBC)

Aug. 29	Jackson State	W	30-14
Sept. 7	UAB	W	32-6
Sept. 21	at Texas	L	3-51
Sept. 28	at Troy	W	13-9
Oct. 5	James Madison	W	21-19
Oct. 12	Southern Miss	W	38-21
Oct. 26	at South Alabama	L	17-46
Nov. 2	at Marshall	L	23-28
Nov. 9	Texas State	L	17-38
Nov. 16	at Auburn	L	14-48
Nov. 23	at Arkansas State	L	21-28
Nov. 30	Louisiana	L	23-37

2025 SCHEDULE

Aug. 28	Saint Francis (Pa.)
Sept. 6	at Alabama
Sept. 20	at UTEP
Sept. 27	Arkansas State
Oct. 4	at Northwestern
Oct. 11	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 18	Troy
Oct. 25	at Southern Miss
Nov. 1	Old Dominion
Nov. 15	South Alabama
Nov. 22	at Texas State
Nov. 29	at Louisiana

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	D'Shaun Ford, RB	★★★
2.	Noah Flemmings, LB	★★★
3.	Roscoe Tucker, IOL	★★★
4.	Kaliem Croswell, IOL	★★★
5.	Zy Jackson, CB	★★★
6.	Mikel Hines, EDGE	★★★
7.	Bryson Kimbrough, QB	★★★
8.	JJ Moultrie, CB	★★★
9.	Fred Clark, EDGE	★★★
10.	Ethan Bailey, EDGE	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bryant Vincent • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 12-13 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Bryant Vincent • Defensive Coordinator: Earnest Hill • Location: Monroe, La. • Stadium: Malone Stadium (27,617)

NEXT MAN UP

10 College Football Coaches with the Best Chance to Win Their First National Championship in 2025

Ohio State's victory over Notre Dame on Jan. 20 moved Buckeyes head coach Ryan Day into an exclusive club. Day is only the third active FBS head coach with a national championship on his résumé, joining Clemson's Dabo Swinney (titles in 2016 and '18) and Georgia's Kirby Smart (2021 and '22) with that honor.

Odds would seem to favor another coach becoming a first-time champion in '25. With Jim Harbaugh (Michigan) and Day (Ohio State) breaking through the title barrier over the past two seasons, the '25 campaign could mark the third consecutive season in which a coach hoists a national title trophy for the first time.

Which coach could follow Day and win his first title in 2025? Here are the best bets to guide their program to a title this fall.

1. STEVE SARKISIAN, TEXAS

The Longhorns have reached the College Football Playoff semifinals in back-to-back seasons. Texas ranks among the favorites to win it all in '25 with quarterback Arch Manning and a handful of standouts on defense.

2. JAMES FRANKLIN, PENN STATE

Under Franklin's watch, the Nittany Lions have won at least 10 games in six of the past nine years. Franklin's '25 squad at Penn State is loaded for another deep playoff run, as quarterback Drew Allar, running backs Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton and defensive end Dani Dennis-Sutton announced their return instead of a departure to the NFL.

3. DAN LANNING, OREGON

The Ducks claimed the No. 1 seed in the 2024-25 College Football Playoff but suffered a 41-21 blowout loss to Ohio State in a quarterfinal at the Rose Bowl. With Lanning's ability to reel in elite talent on the recruiting trail (and via the transfer portal), Oregon will be back in the mix in '25.

4. MARCUS FREEMAN, NOTRE DAME

The Fighting Irish came a win away from the title in the 2024-25 season. Notre Dame must replace quarterback Riley Leonard and a couple of key defenders, but it's safe to assume that Freeman's team will be back in the mix to win it all in '25.

5. BRIAN KELLY, LSU

Kelly is 29-11 through three seasons in Baton Rouge but has yet to make an appearance in the playoff. If LSU misses out again in '25, the hot seat talk will certainly increase. However, with quarterback Garrett Nussmeier and one of the nation's best transfer classes, the Tigers will be among the SEC's title front-runners next season.

6. KALEN DEBOER, ALABAMA

DeBoer guided Washington to an appearance in the national championship in the 2023 season but underachieved with a 9-4 mark at Alabama last year. If the Crimson Tide can find a quarterback to replace Jalen Milroe to go with a deep and talented defense, a return to the playoff is within reach in '25.

7. MARIO CRISTOBAL, MIAMI (FLA.)

Cristobal's recruiting ability is among the best in the sport. And the Hurricanes have made significant progress under his watch, as Miami finished 10-3 and just outside of the playoff last year. With Georgia transfer Carson Beck replacing Cam Ward under center, the Canes should be near the top of the ACC once again.

8. LANE KIFFIN, OLE MISS

The 2024 Rebels were talented enough to win a game (or two) in the College Football Playoff. However, Kiffin's squad missed out after an awful loss to Kentucky and upset defeats to LSU and Florida. Ole Miss is counting on a large portal class to help restock both sides of the ball, and quarterback Austin Simmons is primed for a breakout year.

9. JOSH HEUPEL, TENNESSEE

Heupel guided Tennessee to the College Football Playoff for the first time in 2024. Now, can he take the Volunteers from good to great? Quarterback Nico Iamaleava returns after a solid first full year as the starter, but Heupel has to restock the offensive line and receiving corps and plug a few gaps on one of the SEC's top defenses.

10. SHERRONE MOORE, MICHIGAN

Moore has a lot to prove after an 8-5 debut, although the Wolverines finished strong with wins over Ohio State and Alabama. A standout recruiting class that includes the nation's top prospect, quarterback Bryce Underwood, has the chance to get the program back into the playoff in '25.

THE NEXT TIER/LONG SHOTS IN 2025

Shane Beamer, South Carolina
Bret Bielema, Illinois
Curt Cignetti, Indiana
Kenny Dillingham, Arizona State
Mike Elko, Texas A&M
Billy Napier, Florida
Matt Rhule, Nebraska
Lincoln Riley, USC

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